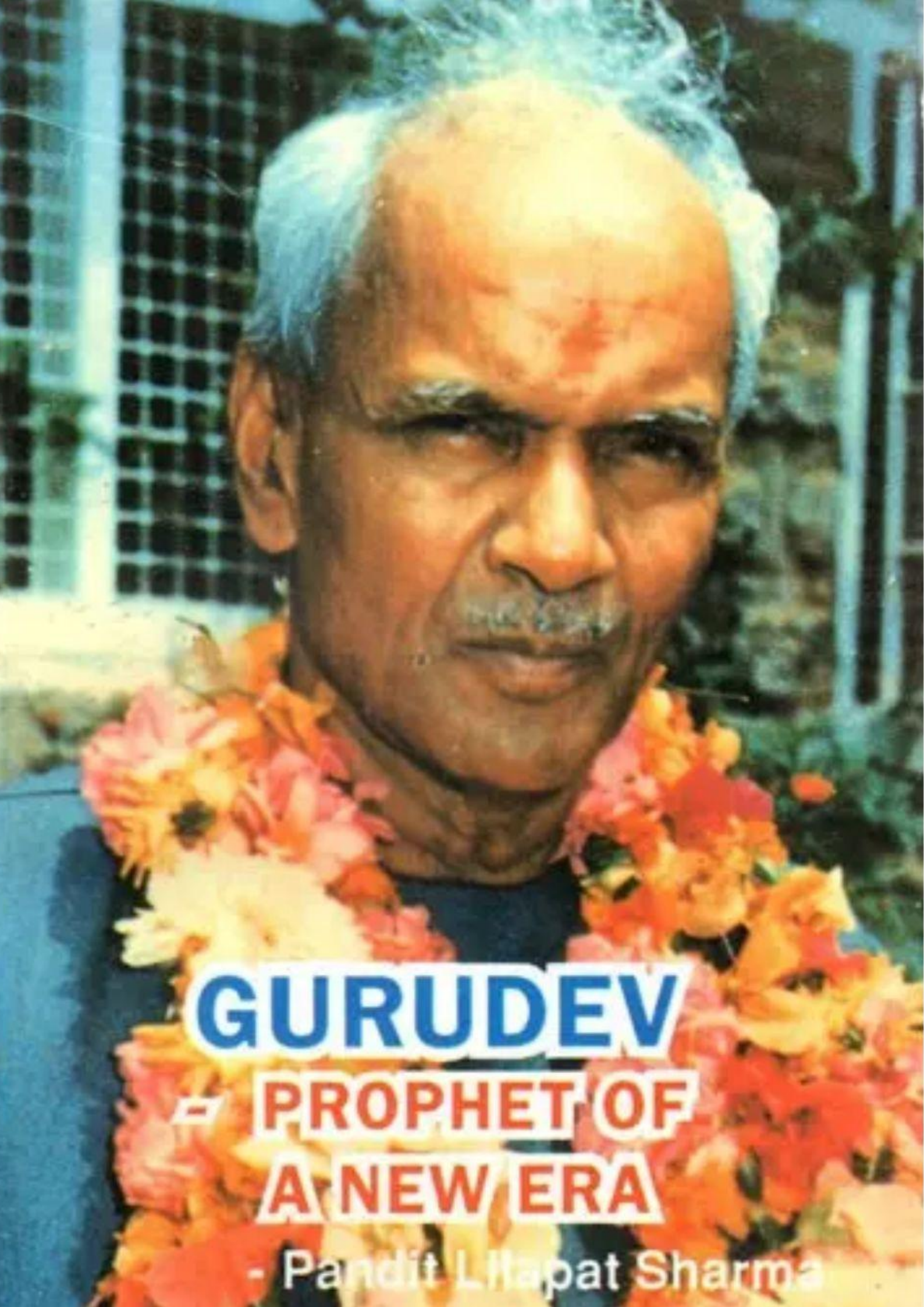

GURUDEV
– PROPHET OF A NEW ERA

- Pandit Lilapat Sharma

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. PROCLAMATION BY SHRIRAM ON THE LAND OF SHRI KRISHNA YEAR – 1958..... 7

2. THE BIRTH AND THE BEGINNING (YEAR 1911 to 1926)..... 18

3. THE DIVINE SPIRIT (DADA GURU) MANIFESTS (YEAR-1926)..... 27

4. GURUDEV PARTICIPATES IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE (1922 TO 1937)..... 34

5. RIGOROUS PENANCE AND PROXIMITY (1926-1937)..... 47

6. THE START OF THE MESSAGE THROUGH "AKHAND JYOTI" (1937-1941)..... 57

7. TAPOBHOOMI – CONSECRATION (1941 To 1958)..... 63

8. THE NEXT STEP (1958-1961)..... 70

9. THE YAGNA CONFERENCE CAMPAIGN (1961-1971)..... 75

10. REVIVAL OF THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION OF THE ANCIENT SAGES (1971 to 1984)..... 84

11. ENTERING THE ETHER AND CASTING THE MORTAL FRAME (1984 to 1990)..... 88

12. REVEREND MATAJI (1926-1994)..... 91

13. THE REASON FOR WRITING THIS BOOK..... 100

INTRODUCTION

Millions of obeisances at the feet of the reverend Gurudev because we are able to write about miraculous episodes from his life. It was my earnest desire that I should be able to write the biography of the one whom I venerate. My above desire was echoed in the minds of many disciples and followers. When Gurudev was amongst us in human form carrying out his routine like other ordinary human beings, even then the desire to write about him was always there. For others he was a great soul, a yogi, a thinker, a man with miraculous powers, saint and social re- former. People have seen him in various roles. But, for me he was God Himself. Just as we address our small talks with confidence to God, similarly I had told many many times to Gurudev to write his autobiography, so that we would be able to drink from its fountain of inspiration.

While mentioning this to him, such books as Gandhiji's 'autobiography', Jawaharlal Nehru's 'my story' and Paramhans Yoganand's 'autobiography of a Yogi' used to come to mind. But whenever I requested Gurudev, he would avoid the subject. He used to say "there is nothing worth writing in my life. Whatever is essential is known to all and there is no point in writing about whatever is unnecessary". But I was not the only one to insist with him to write his autobiography or to have his biography written by others. Many of his followers also used to request him off and on.

If he sometimes told us about him, it was through sheer compassion. Sometimes in lectures or when talking to close associates, he started telling about himself. These tit-bits were no doubt important, but I was not satisfied with that. In those snippets he would mention very little about himself and more about the 'guiding power' which directed him. To such an extent that he considers his day or birth as the day on which he met his mentor 'Dada Guru'. Around the year 1965, I was able to gather some information’s about his birth-place and his family -lineage, but Gurudev himself did not volunteer any information. When questioned by others about the truthfulness or otherwise, he even corroborated what was right and rejected what was not true.

Whenever we tried to go into details, he would stop us by saying that what is seen is not important. What is really important is the sadhana (devotional pursuit) and tapasya (penance) for the supreme which is the great legacy left to us by our rishis and Munis (sages and monks) emphasising that the Supreme within us will start enlightening us in proportion to the amount of the sadhana and tapasya carried out by us. But a person like me-who lives more on the

physical plane and whose mind was not as yet cultivated sufficiently was not satisfied and hence insisted repeatedly with Gurudev for his autobiography.

Is it not a wonder that of the 2000 books penned by Gurudev, not a single one is autobiographical. Of course, there is one book by exception titled "My will and heritage", in which Gurudev has written down only his experiences and conclusions in a summary form. There is very little mention of events and anecdotes, but that too is in the form of axioms. This book was also written only after under the pressure of great insistence from his followers. Even one word written by Gurudev is like the Gospel truth to me.

After reading the above book, my thirst was only partially quenched. Once again, I started requesting gurudev for his autobiography, at the smallest opportunity. I would repeatedly request reverend Mother (wife of Gurudev) to tell Gurudev to be compassionate for our request that lakhs of followers like me want his biography. I must have requested Gurudev and Mataji hundreds of times. Ultimately our request was listened to, but not in the way in which it was made. Before he started the process of severe penances for- years before leaving his physical body by his own will, he said one day, "My biography will be written, but not by me, you people will be writing it"

We had neither any instructions nor any idea of the source- material. When the Government of India honoured him as a freedom-fighter we got some information, but it was related to the freedom- movement. It did not reveal Guruji as a super-human incarnation of a great spirit. We mentioned our incapacity to Gurudev and asked, "where shall we seek? You only please guide us". He consoled us saying that we should try, and that we shall get the Link, the sources as well as the instructions. After giving this assurance, he never said anything further.

When the time came to write the proposed biography, we found that his assurance was being fulfilled in a miraculous way. I had started visiting Gurudev from the days of sahastrakundiya mahayagna (the big oblation of 1000 pyres). Some 8-9 years after that I came to live permanently with him and I developed close relationships with his family-members, viz brothers, nephews, uncles and even villagers. Gurudev's mother showered her love on me as on a son and grandson. And words cannot describe the love showered by reverend Mataji. The relationship has gone on for more or less 45 years now. Whenever I got the chance, I would visit every one, and during the talks, the subject of gurudev would always come up.

Much of the information on Gurudev's childhood came from Taiji (reverend elder mother). From rev. Mataji we learned about his life as a house-holder, pursuit of divinity and his role as a revolutionary thinker. I also talked with Gurudev's brothers, nephews, uncles, relatives and close friends during my work. All these flooded my memory when I started writing the biography. Why I am forced to call this sudden awakening of the memory as a miracle is because I had heard and known these tales but upto now the awareness was lacking. When Gurudev had told me that I will be writing his biography, even then I had not remembered these tales. Later on, when I firmly decided to write his biography, all the tales stored in the memory suddenly followed one after another in serial order on the paper and I have to confess here that in these memories suddenly awakening and flowing forth, there was no effort at all on my part.

As for as truthfulness of the tales is concerned, I have thoroughly checked them out. I am not a learned person, nor do I know the art of writing nor do I have the ability to judge the truthfulness or otherwise of the incidents. Even then I can confidently say that the incidents or tales mentioned here have been confirmed and corroborated in many ways. This writer is fortunate to have lived with reverend Gurudev and to have gone with him from place to place at the various Gayatri Yagnas conducted by him from 1965 to 1971. During these journeys many a times I heard from his own mouth about many incidents for which he strictly asked me not to reveal them to anyone. Except for them, many incidents unknown to others are revealed here for the first time. There are some incidents which were known to some people. Bringing all these together in this book, it can be said with certainty that this book is a truthful reproduction to the extent possible.

It is my humble claim that this book on the life of Gurudev is the first one of its kind written in narrative anecdotal style. The miracles in his presence or by his blessings, various persons' personal experience and their material successes because of his blessings are noted and printed in many publications. These have an importance of their own and one will develop faith in Gurudev upon reading them. But I have kept away from such one-track narration.

Gurudev was doubtless an incarnation. Though He has always modestly claimed that he is not an Avtar (incarnation), and also claimed that the Mahakal (the "destroyer" from the divine triad of creator, maintainer and destroyer) will manifest as the 10th incarnation or Pragyavatar, I consider Him only as the Pragyavatar which literally means an "incarnation of purified intelligence"

explained further, the implied meaning is that his thoughts will be spread and passed on to all human beings to destroy the evil mode of thinking and evil tendencies which have gripped their minds. For many others like me, he was "God." It is wrong to say he "was". I have no understanding of religion, spiritualism and philosophy. What is God, how does He manifest, whether He manifests at all or not is subject for the sages, I never worried about the same nor have I considered myself capable of thinking on this subject.

I have believed deeply from my soul that he is "God." Philosophers describe that Entity as Nirgun and Nirakar (Nirgun- beyond all characteristics) of universal creation. The same for me has taken the bodily form of Gurudev. For us the manifestation or expression of the Formless into a bodily form is an incarnation. Peculiar miracles occur in the presence of such incarnate powers. Aside from this there is one more form of an incarnation... the form in which they lay down codes of conduct the people's inspiration for hard work, adventure, duties, positive results and faith gets strengthened in the framework of these rules. In this book I have combined both while unfolding the biography of Gurudev.

I will consider my effort worthwhile if, upon reading this book, someone's life gets enlightened or his faith in Gurudev becomes ever strengthened or the reader becomes interested to know and understand more about Gurudev. Whatever is holy and auspicious in this is the offering of Gurudev, the incarnation. Whatever may be found lacking, is my fault.

- Pandit Lilapat Sharma

PROCLAMATION BY SHRIRAM ON THE LAND OF SHRI KRISHNA YEAR - 1958

The joyous enthusiasm of Deepawali was still present in the birth-place and the playground of Lord Shri Krishna. It was one week after the festival of lights was over, but in the festival-loving Mathura-Vrindavan its appearance, colour and taste still lingered on the people. As it is all the festivals - with their own pomp - keep on giving joy for a long time to the people, but Deepavali has a special attraction for the people. The enthusiasm for the Mahalakshami pooja is the same as seen all over India, but after one day the enthusiasm crosses all bounds. This is the day of Govardhan pooja. It is said that on this day Lord Krishna had raised the vast Govardhan mountain on the tip of his little finger.

On this day the cows are traditionally worshipped here with great elan, cows whom Lord Krishna also honoured like honouring one's own mother and whom he served and worshipped. The cows are worshipped even to-day in the land of Kanha or Krishna and the joy of worship manifests continuously for a number of days. When the cows, colourfully painted, anointed with mehndi and decked with peacock-feathers walk, the bells around their necks tinkle and the person hearing the tinkling music feels as if he is present with Lord Krishna walking with his beloved cows.

In such a unique atmosphere bathed in the joy of the Deepavali festival, hundreds of workers were engaged in a different programme of this Era. They were perhaps not clearly aware, that the preparations that they were making, were about to transform the era. They did not think it necessary to know this. They had come here on being called by their Guru and were carrying out the work shown and given to them. For them it was a great privilege to obey the Guru's orders. Therefore, the question of the historic importance of this project never arose in their minds. But it was a matter of great astonishment for people observing these dedicated workers at work. Many of them even asked, "You people are here from before Diwali. Do you not remember your family-members and children?"

During Diwali people stay with their family and children. Even those who are thousands of miles away, return to their homes for Lakshmi pooja. And on the contrary here you are far away from your home'. There was a mixture of surprise and admonition from some of the people. But there was no reaction from the workers carrying on the various tasks, digging pits, carrying away the earth in big urns or carrying bamboo strips from here to there. If it became really necessary

to reply, they would answer that their Guru's home is their own home. They are observing the Diwali festival with their parents only, and would be observing the Diwali not for the traditional 5 days but for 5 weeks and then only would return home. Many workers had even brought their families with them. Their wives and children were also willingly doing the work.

This is the tale of 1958. The project in which hundreds of workers were involved by discarding the attraction of their families and Diwali festival was "Sahastra Kundiya Gayatri Mahayagna", the most important religious programme of this era. There may have been other projects involving more people, greater hustle-bustle and even bigger budgets, but these will not be able to come up to even one-tenth of the results which this Mahayagna of 1958 achieved.

Approximately a year earlier it was decided to conduct the Mahayagna. The supernatural power guiding the hero of our story reverend Gurudev, must have decided on this project even much much earlier. Perhaps he must have informed Gurudev about it, when he had asked Gurudev to be involved in severe penance long long ago. But to people like us who were knowing Gurudev only by his physical body, the information on the decision for this project was given hardly 6 months before the due date. In sending the invitation to his followers, Gurudev had mentioned that he wanted 100,000 dedicated disciples. Only those persons would be allowed to take part in the Mahayagna who would have carried out earlier the necessary prayers and penances as per his (Gurudev's) instructions. Only they would be fit to participate. (see following paragraph)

To become fit for taking part in the Mahayagna, the disciples had to do the following over a period of one year -- 1) Reciting the Gayatri Mantra for 125,000 times 2) 52 fasts during one year (one day per week)3) avoiding soft bedding 4) observe celibacy and 5) not to ask anyone to do personal work like washing one's clothes etc. The people who took the above message of Gurudev to their own areas were very doubtful about people's willingness to participate under the above terms and conditions. As such it is difficult to get together even 5000 persons, then how would it be possible to involve 100,000 people? And with the above 5 'do's and don'ts it looked even impossible.

Some workers even expressed their doubts to Gurudev. Gurudev told them to ignore such doubts and explained, "Only That Divine Power which has decided upon this project knows whether such 100,000 willing to fulfil the above conditions will be available or not. The same Divine power will worry about the

planning and success of the project. Our responsibility is merely to carry out the instructions. No body should think more than that and no body need worry"

After Gurudev's above explanation nobody asked again about how the target of 100,000 workers will be achieved or how the project will be carried out or organised. The mission's workers were given the responsibility of carrying the message of the Mahayagna. They went to their respective areas, spread the message, gave the invitation, distributed rice and also explained the rules regarding the fitness for taking part in the mahayagna. After discharging the given responsibility, the workers returned and on exchanging information they realised that their mission was a great success.

Those who had resolved to become fit under the 5 conditions numbered over 100,000. Not only that, but thousands of intending participants had also decided to contribute in the mahayagna with body, mind and money i.e. with physical labour, own willingness and cash. Nobody had told them about this. In his invitation, Gurudev had specifically mentioned that this project is not undertaken on the strength of money. Of course, money would be required but the supernatural divine powers will administer to that. We have to gather in this plan by demonstrating our renunciation and faith only. We can benefit from this project only by faith, service, working for others and donating our physical labour.

Gurudev had also clearly stated that the followers participating in this project should not be satisfied with merely finishing the one year's panance and offering oblations in the mahayagna. The real participation and partnership will actually start in the future. The sadhana or one year's preparation and oblation in the mahayagna is the beginning of that participation. This beginning is also preparation for carrying out our responsibility in the coming years. In the message it was not specified as what is to be done in the coming years. Only an indication was given that the future will bring more responsibilities and these will not be given to any individual or institution but will have been decided-in advance-by Mahakal. It was also indicated that the followers coming to take part in the yagna must be mentally prepared that they will have to work throughout the life for the future of religious and cultural regeneration.

With full understanding of the above message and after firmly resolving in their minds, the workers who had come to Mathura before Diwali became actively involved in creating the township for the yagna. The plan was to create the township ahead of the Lakshmi Narayan temple which is on the road between

Mathura and Vrindavan. The Lakshmi Narayan temple is commonly known as the Birla temple and is situated about a kilometre away from the Gayatri Tapobhoomi. The area for the proposed township for the yagna was to stretch from the Gayatri Tapobhoomi to beyond the Birla temple. Thus, the construction of the township was estimated to start where the residential area of Mathura was geuing over before the Gayatri Tapobhoomi area. Breadthwise the township was expected to extend from the railway-line in the West to the Yamuna in the East. But the central point would be Gayatri Tapobhoomi and the town would spread beyond the Birla temple. The preparations started on the above basis.

On the right-hand side on the Vrindavan road, the Yagnashala of 1024 Yagna-pits were created in a 7000 square metre area. All the yagna-pits were not in one lot. They were made into lots of 8 each under one roof. In this way one mega Yagnashala housing 128 small Yagnashalas was created. Border-gardens were created around each Yagnashala. Barley was sown in these border gardens and the green plants there soon started undulating in the breeze. The main dais for seating Lord Brahma and the Acharya (the officiating priest) on the main entrance of the Yagnashala and nearby a temple of Mother Gayatri was also erected.

This part of the Mahayagna where oblations would be offered in the fire was so beautiful that it gave the viewer an ideal of the Yagna-sites of the ancient sages. Who amongst us has seen the big Yagnas Planned by these big rishis and venerable sages? But our Yagna- Township was very similar to the mental picture formed in our minds upon reading the ancient scriptures. The Sabha-mandap or the assembly-pandal exactly opposite the Yagna-shala was also decorated beautifully. Around these areas a dispensary, an office for the workers of the seva-samiti and volunteers, and offices for the police and the local administration were temporarily erected.

From the manner in which the followers were invited for taking part, it was expected that between 100,000 to 1,50,000 persons would arrive. All the provinces and sectors of India were to be represented by them and accordingly arrangements were made to accommodate them. In an area stretching 3 kilometres between Gayatri Tapobhoomi and Prem Mahavidyalaya 8 town- ships were created and these were named after 8 venerable ancient sages. The followers were accommodated in such a way that people from one province or sector would stay together. This was for ease of contact and mess-facilities and worked really well.

The eight townships were named after the great sages Narad, Dadhichi, Vyas, Patanjali, Vashishtha, yagnavalkya, Bhardwaj and Vishwamitra. The workers from Madhya Pradesh were housed in Narad nagar (town) and Patanjali nagar, from Rajasthan in Vashishtha nagar, from Uttar Pradesh in Vishwamitra nagar and those from Saurashtra, Bombay, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Punjab, Delhi and other areas of India were accommodated in the remaining townships. Dadhichi nagar was kept exclusively for housing the monks. This place was in Jaisinhpura near Gayatri Tapobhoomi. Separate teams of volunteer-workers were created for looking after each township. Each team had a leader also, who was selected because of his ability at organisation and leadership.

The selection of the teams and each team's leader was done personally by reverend Gurudev and reverend Mataji. It was emphatically explained to every person involve in the organisation of the Yagna that each and every worker is equal even though the level of their individual responsibility may be big or small. No one should be considered high or low. When Lord Rama attacked Lanka for destroying the devilish terrorism of Ravan, at that time the contribution of the tiny squirrel -- in throwing a pebble into the sea for erecting the bridge -- was of the same magnitude as that of the powerful bears Jambuvant and Nal and Neel. The Lord's love for the tiny squirrel was in the same measure as was his love for Hanuman, Jambuvant and Sugreev. The importance of the work for God or for divine projects is not measured by the physical contribution but by the deep feeling and the attitude associated with it.

The volunteer-workers in charge of the organisation of each township were all from high strata both financially and socially. For instance, the organiser of Narad nagar Shribajrang Vallabhsinh was the jagirdar (big landlord) of Hamirpur. The responsibility for Vyasnagar was given to Manibhai Patel. Vyas nagar was the biggest township and a big pond was specially created here for providing bathing facilities.

Opposite Vyas nagar on the left-hand side of the road came Patanjali nagar, whose in charge was Kanhaiyalal Vaidya. Ramswarup Gandhi was in charge of Vashishtha nagar. Jeetendra Veer looked after the charge of Vishwamitra nagar. All were experienced and thus the organisation of all the 7 townships was in good hands.

The Mahayagna was to start on Kartik Shukla Ekadashi of Vikram Samvat 2015 (or 22nd November 1958.) By the eve of this date, all the townships were fully settled. Nowhere in any tent was there any extra capacity for further

accommodation. The same was the situation four days earlier also. All the seven townships were 75% full. Clear instructions were given in advance that only those followers who were given permission to attend should arrive, These instructions were strictly implemented but even then there were many workers who had forgotten to seek permission in due time: they were so busy in carrying Gurudev's message to the people that they did not remember that they had to inform the headquarters about their arrival or that they were required to take advance permission.

To give an example --- Purushottamdas Soni and Mulji Patel were two workers from the Dharangadhra branch in Saurashtra region. They started on bicycle four months prior to the mahayagna for Mathura, 800 kilometres from their hometown. Both had decided to travel 8 to 10 kilometres by bicycle and wherever they halted for the night, they would organise and address a small meeting. In between wherever they came to a hamlet or a village, they contacted the people and informed them about the mahayagna at Mathura.

Mahavir Sinh and Mishraji of Etawa also started on bicycle and went on making propaganda about the yagna while travelling to Mathura. From the Sisoli (Uttar Pradesh) branch Ajab Datta, the mission's active worker started on foot for Mathura because he was blind. It was impossible for him to travel on a bicycle or drive a vehicle. Throughout the journey on foot, he went spreading Gurudev's message. Whoever heard his message was spell-bound by his dedication and faith.

Thakur Ratansingh from Rajasthan's Jodhpur district came on horseback. His style was uniquely different. He was clad in yellow-coloured dress -dhoti, shirt and turban, all in yellow. He carried a yellow-coloured flag with the 'Om' symbol painted on it. In this typical Rajasthani dress, whenever he reached the border of any village, he would blow on his conch. On hearing the horn- like sound from the conch people would gather round him and he would make them hail the Gayatri-mata and the Yagna-Bhagwan as soon as 25-50 people gathered, he would inform them the reason of his arrival and tell them that the era is about to change and for that a vast yagna is being organised at Mathura.

The yagna will be performed on 1000 yagna-pits and this type of project has not been conducted earlier, nor is there a possibility of such an event in the future. On hearing this message people would ask about its plan and its organisers. When their interest was aroused, they would also ask as to what they should do to take part in it. Ratansingh would inform them about going to Mathura, to

spread the message of Gayatri in their own area, to personally worship Gayatri and inspire them to initiate satpravruttis (good activities) for removing evil. It is difficult to say how many people imbibed this inspiration, but Ratansingh was not concerned and would say that his work was to make the people hear the message of Gurudev and I made them hear it.

If he worried about the results, it would slacken his efforts. Workers like Purushottam Soni, Shashikant, Mulji Patel, Ajab Dutta and Ratansingh numbered more than fifty. Instead of availing of railway or motorcar, they started out on their modest vehicles or on foot, spread Gurudev's message on the way and came to Mathura. Reverend Gurudev compared their dedication and faith to that of the tiny squirrel's contribution in the building of the setubandh (the bridge over the sea) when Lord Rama wanted to build it.

By 21st November a vast multitude of people collected. Out of every hundred arrivals at Mathura station, 70 to 80 had come for the mahayagna. The trains were choke-full. Shiv Dutt Pandey who was ticket-checker at the station in those days, says that some of the passengers had issued tickets for Kosi and Palwal which were ahead of Mathura. When Pandey informed them that the station was Mathura and not Kosi or Palwal, they would say that they wished to get down at Mathura only but were forced to buy tickets for Kosi or Palwal because tickets for Mathura had gone out of stock because of earlier heavy rush.

Many visitors even said that the railway stations -from where they boarded the trains -had stopped issuing tickets altogether. Not only for Mathura, but tickets for any station on the route went out of stock. The reason was one and only one i.e. the enthusiasm of the people who wanted to come. Similar stories were heared at the bus- station from the passengers arriving by bus. Similarly, people who came by their own vehicles or by hired taxis and contract-buses had their own stories to tell. The essence of all of it was that the flood of the arriving humanity continued unabated.

The 22nd November was the day of Devotthan Ekadashi, day considered very holy. Full preparations were carried out by 4 o'clock before dawn for the Prabhat-pheri (procession at dawn- time). Thousands of workers stood in disciplined queue between Gayatri Tapobhoomi and Birla mandir. They carried banners proclaiming the transformation of the era and other slogans. Conches were blown to signify the start of the proceedings. After that bells were rung and the dawn-time procession started by hailing Mother Gayatri and informing the entire city of Mathura that the Gayatri Mahayagna has begun.

After the dawn-time procession, the Kalash-yatra started. In front of all was the reverend Mataji (Bhagwati Devi Sharma). Behind her were 128 ladies bearing water-filled mangal kalash (benefic bots) on their heads. Behind them were the workers who had come to the yagna. The kalash-yatra in the morning formally proclaimed the beginning of the mahayagna. On this day the people of Mathura said, 'What kind of a miracle is this? Not a single Naya paisa was taken from anyone in this town and the project began.' Many of them even started walking towards the Tapobhoomi out of curiosity. They wanted to see for themselves as to how the preparations have been made. On coming here, they were wonder-struck when they saw the beauty, of the yagna- site and the brilliant decoration of the Tapobhoomi.

After the kalash-yatra was over, the preparations at the yagna-site started in earnest. Near every yagna-pit samidha (wood- sticks for putting in the fire) havan-samagri (grains, fruits, ghee, flowers etc), vessels and spoons for performing the yagna and asans (soft carpet-like square pieces of cloth to sit upon) etc were brought forth. On the day of the prabhat-pheri the preparations at the site of the yagna and the lecture-pandal were checked and rechecked to find out if anything was lacking, and if so, to provide for it, just before sunrise reverend Gurudev entered the Yagnasshala or the place where the yagna was to be conducted. Along with him thousands of participants came. Pandit Haridutta Sharma was given the status of Brahma under whose overall sanction the yagna has to be conducted. He gave the signal to commence the proceedings and the Hotas (those who will offer the oblations) began chanting the mantra of pavitrikaran (purification).. The mahayagna started.

It may be mentioned in passing that the formal inauguration of the yagna was done by the then Member of Parliament, Sheth Vishanchandra with a short speech. After this, reverend Gurudev emphasised the need to change the customs, traditions and rituals with the changed times and situations. In his address, Gurudev also explained away the doubts and criticisms regarding the Sahastrekundiya Yagna. The first phase of the yagna was carried out smoothly. In the afternoon lectures and seminars were conducted in which various learned people gave lectures on religion and culture.

The special feature in these lectures were the Vedic recitations by the brahmacharis from the Gurukuls, various incidents and stories from the ancient scriptures and their explanations, and the experiences narrated by leading social workers. Reverend Gurudev's lectures were in a class by themselves. During

these lectures Gurudev also would give an introduction about how the mission is gradually taking shape and would announce the forthcoming agenda.

On the first day Gurudev said that more persons than expected have arrived and hence it is quite possible that facilities may not be available for all but we shall try in every possible way to overcome the difficulties even though we may have to spend more than the budget. Even then if there were some difficulties, he asked his followers to bear with them as one dose with small difficulties in one's own family. A number of followers from the audience immediately shouted "We have no difficulties, Gurudev, do not worry at all".

The next day reverend Gurudev threw light on the role of Gayatri Parivar Missioon in Yug Nirman (the socio- cultural religious reformation for the coming era). This would be the source, the basis for Yug Nirman. He put forth various programmes for adopting moral values in personal lives and removing backwardness and wrong customs and beliefs from the society. That speech of Gurudev is a milestone not only in the Yug Nirman movement but also in human history. In that speech he laid down a practical programme for a complete transformation of the society, the nation and the entire world. The Yug Nirman Mission has achieved its current status by working on the above programme.

As part of the simultaneous social reformation movement, during the Sahastrakundiya Gayatri Mahayagna, the ideal of dowry-free and waste-free marriages was proposed and an alternative was shown. The people gathered there resolved enmasse to remove the disgusting custom of mrutyu-bhoj or feast ceremony after the death of a relative. Gurudev reminded those in their fifties about the widespread prevalence of this custom from their childhood to youth. The situation to-day after that firm resolve is different and to-day there is no sign of that disgusting custom. Again, in those days Gurudev gave a programme for organising people at various places for the purpose of awakening and establishing a firm belief in God and for creating an awareness for one's duty. As a result, to-day there are thousands of branches of Gyatri Parivar or Yug Nirman Mission in this country and abroad.

One of the programmes of the Sahastrakundiya Gayatri Maha yagya was the 'Naramedh' yagna. Gurudev explained the deeper meaning of the word Naramedh, the essence of which is that man will give up his selfish interest for the service of the society. In this yagna, four men gave up their selfish interests in the ritual and dedicated themselves totally to the service of the mission. Later on, many people followed their example and those of them who served the

mission in this manner throughout their lives have experienced spiritual upliftment and inner peace.

The Sahastrakundiya Gayatri Mahayagna was completed on 26th November 1958. This was the day of the full moon in the Kartik month of the calendar. Ahutis (oblations) were offered upto ten o'clock in the morning. After that the mission's followers took a vow to fulfil the tasks allotted to them and to spread the divine message to everyone. Instead of the ancient custome to feed brahmins after the yagna-completion, a new trend was started by rev. Gurudev for the Indian society. This was to honour the women as respectable human beings. Thus, as a mark of respect towards them, young girls from every home in Mathura were invited to a ritual feast and these young ladies along with the daughters of the followers were fed and given a small present each.

After the above feast, once again a procession was taken round the Mathura city. This procession was much larger compared to first days because of floats depicting Lord Krishna and his incarnations of Rama, Buddha etc., as also the floats of such divine sages as Narada, Vyas, Valmiki and saints such as Guru Nanak, Kabir, Tulsi etc... Other floats showed incidents from the lives of the Lord's dedicated devotees such as Dadhichi, Harishchandra, Dhruva etc. Another section of the floats depicted historical incidents.

Behind these floats were women and after that a decorated chariot carried books in which people had inscribed Gayatri mantras over a period of time and pictures of Gayatri mata and Yagna-Bhagwan (the deity who manifests unseen at the time of the yagna). Behind the chariot came Gurudev and thousands of followers of the Gayatri Parivar Mission proclaiming the creation of a new order in the coming era. The procession went on for 7 long hours and throughout the 8-kilometre path it was halted by joyous citizens to hail and welcome it. Although the procession lasted 7 hours, the waves of enthusiasm never ebbed in the followers.

Every follower who came to this had some kind of novel experience to narrate. Out of these, let us suffice by mentioning two of these. One was that each one said that Gurudev met him in person and talked to him and gave him instructions. In reality Gurudev was so busy supervising the preparations for the Yagna and the lecture-programmes that it was impossible that he would individually meet so many people. But it is a fact that the followers not only experienced the above phenomenon but gave proof in the form of Gurudev's

autograph, some message handwritten by Gurudev, instruction for family-members, and help given at the site of accommodation.

These people also found Gurudev helping them miles away from Mathura when they were coming to the yagna. Many days after the yagna was over some people queried a saint living on the bank of Yamuna River near Vrindavan... about such phenomenon. He did not suppress his suspicion when asking the saint who replied that "India is Dev-Bhoomi (divine land). In this land the Lord has shown his charisma innumerable times in various incarnations by meeting every devotee in a different way. On returning from his exile, Lord Ram met every citizen of Ayodhya "individually" and so did Lord Krishna meet every devotee Gopika (shepherdess). Those who say that Gurudev met them individually are not telling a lie. There is no doubt that Gurudev met all these persons".

The second experience is regarding the expenses for the yagna. 'Miracle' is the only word to explain it. Over 400000 persons came to this yagna which lasted for 5 days. Aside from the expenses for their lodging and boarding, the expenses for yagna- site, preparations for the yagna-pits and the things such as wood, flowers, grains, ghee and many such ancillaries would by itself come to a very big amount. Considering the 1958 market rates, this would come to Rs. 50 lakhs, but to-day in 1995 it would came to Rs. 10 crores. All these expenses were met without donation from anywhere. Also, no individual or individuals were asked to bear the expenses. Therefore, it is all the more a matter for wonder! Some people also asked Gurudev about it. Gurudev's reply was, "Even I don't know how the arrangements were made. My Gurudev wanted the Mahayagna to be performed and I obeyed. Only He would know about how he achieved all this".

People have thousands of different experiences to tell about the Mahayagna. From these, the above two have been selected by the saint from Vrindavan referred earlier. Explaining these experiences, he said, "your Guru is very much near every disciple and is like the disciple's soul. He is here by the will of God and only God is taking care of all his work. Those who can understand this fact, will understand everything." Within a short while after Gurudev cast off the mortal body by his own will, the above saint also cast off his body. He had explained many of the known and unknown secrets of Gurudev to dedicated seekers.

THE BIRTH AND THE BEGINNING (YEAR 1911 to 1926)

The reader who is not familiar with Gurudev would certainly want to ask, "Who is Gurudev?" The story begins back, before 1911 in the home of Gurudev's parents, when certain unexplainable events started happening in their home. We shall come to these events after giving a brief introduction about Gurudev's father Pandit Roopkishore Sharma and mother Dankunvriji.

GURUDEV'S FATHER

Pandit Roopkishore Sharma was a highly learned Sanskrit Pandit with a deep knowledge of Shrimad Bhagwat, one of the most revered religious scriptures in India. He was in great demand for conducting Bhagwat Katha (reciting and explaining the Bhagwat) He was staying at Aanwalkheda, 65 kms away from Mathura. In nearby Agra city Panditji had a mansion where he ran a free residential school for teaching Sanskrit language, its grammar and in-depth explanation including the essence of the hidden meaning in the difficult stanzas of the Bhagwat. The students stayed here in the Gurukul fashion i.e. living an austere life free of charge and not only learned the language and the scripture but also the code of conduct and discipline for a proper life. Panditji treated them with love care as his own children.

Panditji's style of Bhagwat-katha was melodious and left the listener spellbound. He was in great demand not only with the common people but also with far flung Rajas and Maharajas. Among his close associates and admirers were such highly knowledgeable people as Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya the founder of Banares University, Amiyanath, Swami Brajnandandas, and Pandit Pandurang Joshi Shastri. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya firmly believed that timeless universal religion is enshrined in Shrimad Bhagwat and anyone who wants to understand this religion which is for everyone on this planet must read Bhagwat. He also stressed that Pandit Roopkishoreji so lucidly explained the meaning of religion, spirituality, philosophy, and the tangles of politics, society and personal life through his Bhagwat-discourses, that afterwards there was nothing left for understanding.

Bhagwat gives a profound inspiration for simple-living without any desire for accumulating money or worldby goods and Roopkishoreji's life reflected it. From whatever the people gave him for his discourses, he kept only the amount necessary for maintaining daily life and gave away the remaining amount to temples, needy brahmins and for looking after monks. From the earlier

generations in his family, nearby 2000 acres of land had been accumulated. These were given by grateful devotees. But Panditji practically lived the life of an ascetic and was not interested in farming and used to give the land for cultivation on a sharing-basis. People who had observed him closely used to say that Panditji was involved in some tapasya (deep penance)

Unexplained Phenomena occur

In such an atmosphere of pure living, some peculiar events started happening at home before the onset of 1911. One day early in the morning Dankunvriji had kept the milk for boiling and she was sitting near the stove and thinking about same work. Earlier in her life she had never felt drowsy at this hour but on this day, she suddenly dozed off. In a dream-like phenomenon she found herself in some unknown place. There was white light everywhere and the land also looked white as if snow-clad but without human beings. The breeze wafting from the trees and shrubs was full of a divine fragrance which brought a wonderful joy to the mind and soul. Then the scene changed and the Eastern side suddenly shines with brilliance. Amidst this brilliant light a female form is seen sitting, and on seeing this divine lady, one loses all senses. Suddenly Dankunvriji awakens and finds that the milk is boiling on the stove.

Honeybees and cows

One more event took place around this time suddenly from nowhere honeybees came to the mansion and within 10 days made 4 to 5 honeycombs. It was decided to drive away the honeybees by lighting fires under the honeycombs. As soon as Dankunvriji -- lovingly known as Taiji, which means grandmother -- came to know this, she immediately intervened and said that nobody should disturb the honeybees because they do not disturb us and hence, we have no right to destroy their homes. Roopkishoreji in the meantime returned from a tour and he also supported Taiji, saying that this is actually a blessing from God Shiva who has given the task of honey-collection to these creatures. These bees remained for about a month and then as suddenly vanished as they had come earlier.

Another thing started happening simultaneously. A large number of cows started coming to the mansion. As it was, the family maintained a full herd of cows and they were very well looked after. But daily 15 to 20 cows belonging to others would gather in front of the door and stand there. This went on for a few days and then suddenly stopped. Everyone was surprised at these events. Pandit

Roopkishoreji explained it on the basis of his knowledge and experience and said that some divine soul is preparing to come into our family.

Dreams galore

Many a time the mansion would be filled with the fragrance of incense sticks or fragrance of various types of wood used in yagnas. Then the fragrance would disappear all of a sudden.

One day Taiji dreamt that she was standing near a lake full of lotus flowers. In another dream she saw that a number of gods came in their divine chariots from the east and while hovering over the home started showering flowers. There were repeated dreams of herds of cows, mango-gardens, pots on which coconuts are kept on the mouth (KALASH) this is considered a very holy symbol denoting peace and prosperity). In the final dream of yogi with long hair heaped high on the head was telling something, but Taiji could not hear exactly what he said. All the above phenomena and the dreams went on until the 3rd week of September 1911.

Around 9 a.m. on Thursday the 20th September 1911, Gurudev was born. Knowledgeable astrologers studied the horoscope and announced that a divine soul has come into this world to carry out a specific task and will leave this world only after completing it. This person will have knowledge of the occult and will receive co-operation from all sides. This person will be unaffected by the bondage that plagues the living creatures and will guide innumerable people towards virtuous life and salvation and will receive adulation and homage from millions of people.

The unexplained divine events continue - music and sadhus

Divine music was heared for 24 hours after Gurudev was born. It was also felt as if learned persons were reciting the Vedas sonorously. Sometimes it was felt that the famous epic of Ramcharit Manas is being recited. Some people heard Gayatri mantra being recited. The divine music stopped by itself after 24 hours. After two days the famous holy festival of Navaratri started. During these nine days suddenly, sadhus started coming and standing in front of the door. If asked why they are standing there, they would remain silent. If given gifts or alms, they would not accept. They would simply keep on staring at the room of Taiji.

When the baby cried, they would hear the sound and then go away as if satisfied. Taiji became afraid when she heard all this. One day an elderly sanyasi stood

outside the door for one and a half hours. On learning this, Taiji came out muttering in anger. She told the Sanyasi with fear, "Why are you casting your (evil) eye on my son? What wrong has he done?" The Sanyasi replied in a very quiet and sober tone, "I have not come to harm the child. Nobody is capable of harming him. Actually, he is a native of the Himalayas and has been sent here by the siddhas (monks with divine powers) from there. We are just ordinary sanyasis and when we come to know of such an event, we are templed to come for a glimpse.

Taiji's worry increased even more. She said, "No, I will not allow anyone to have a glimpse of my beloved child. You people should stop coming here." And she went to her room and sat before the image of Lord Dwarikadhish (Lord Shri Krishna) and fervently praying before him. Any mother's prayer to the supreme Father is always one, that is, "Please protect my son. Please don't separate him from me. Let not anyone's evil-eye affect him". And perhaps the Lord granted her wish. After her pleading with that elderly sanyasi, no sadhu came to the mansion. Not only that, but even the divine and unexplainable phenomena lessened and ceased after about a month and a half and life returned to normal and at the appropriate time the child's naming ceremony was performed and the child was named "Shriram".

The child was sent to school at the age of five but his education started practically after his birth. Father Roopkishoreji would sit near the child on returning from his host's home from the Bhagwat Katha and gently recite the stanzas from scriptures such as the Gita, Ramcharitmanas and Shrimad Bhagwat, mainly from his favourite Shrimad Bhagwat. As soon as the child was 3 years old and could remain away from the mother, father Roopkishoreji started taking him on his Bhagwat-Kathas. The child had the advantage of being properly looked after because he was the son of the preacher. He would listen with rapt attention to father's discourses. He may not have understood all that was said, but in the pious, atmosphere, the effect of the holy discourse was certainly leaving an impression on his subconscious.

Pandit Roopkishoreji also believed that the child's formal education was necessary to familiarise him with the outside world so that he should mingle with children of his age and develop a healthy personality. So, he was enrolled in the local primary school under Pandit Roopram who was not only a brilliant teacher but also took personal interest in each and every student. Pandit Roopram was more like a loving mother to every student. Thus, the students

were never afraid of him and grasped the studies very easily and their natural personalities also developed very properly. In fact, when Gurudev fondly remembered Pandit Roopramji when in- augurating the Gayatri Vidyapith at Shantikunj Haridwar and said that under such a teacher the personalities of two-thirds of the students would flower forth in a natural manner without any pressure.

As a child, Gurudev studied under Pandit Roopram for 3 years and then all of a sudden stopped going to the school altogether. Even Pandit Roopram had realised that the child Shriram had nothing more to learn from him because the teacher had poured the required understanding and knowledge into the child. Also, Shriram was more interested to roam in mango- gardens, jungles, river banks and bowers. He would take his companions there and discuss the importance of the Gayatri mantra, the Himalayas... famous for meditation by sages, the power of the supreme and the Gods, the yogis and their yogic powers and attainments and also about the methods of penances to achieve them.

He had also discovered a cave in a jungle. He used to sit inside it for hours. When his friends asked him as to 'What kind of a play' it was, he said it was samadhi (going into very deep meditation). He would also teach meditation to his companions. Some could grasp it and some could not. One of them informed Taiji that Shriram was in the habit of sitting alone in the cave. Taiji severely scolded the child Shriram and told him of the dangers of tigers and leopards and how they would eat a human being. He smiled at this but also respected his mother's wish and promised her that he will not sit in the cave henceforth.

As the tales about child Shriram's going into the cave became known, his companions were prevented by their parents from going with him. Also, Shriram had started roaming to very lonely places and now rarely any friends accompanied him, so he got more and more time for meditation. One day at the age of ten, all of a sudden, he started walking in the northern direction. He was walking about 4 miles away on a lone path. One of the elderly neighbours met him on the way and gently asked him where he was going.

Shriram told him that he was going to the Himalayas. The elderly neighbour laughed it away as a child's fancy and went away. But on reaching home he found a big commotion and found that people were fervently searching him. People went in different directions looking for him and finally found him 10 miles away from home, walking steadily towards a nearby railway station. His intention was

to go by railway to Bareily and from there to Haridwar and Rishikesh and onwards to Himalaya mountains.

On finding him, the people somehow persuaded him to return home and the moment he entered home, Taiji held him in a firm embrace as if she would never let him go and started crying and cajoled him for a long time. The sum and substance of it all was "As long as I am alive, do not even think of leaving me. If you wanted to became a monk, why did you take birth here? You should have remained in the Himalayas only. "Does a mother not have any right on her son? Taiji lived a long time after that and Gurudev always kept her with him. He was never away from her except when he was in seclusion or conducting big yagnas.

Gurudev's father took this incident very seriously and decided that the child's yagnopavit Sanskar (akin to baptism) be performed, and that too by no less a person than the profound scholar and founder of Banaras University, the late Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The ceremony was performed in the University's compound and putting the holy thread around his neck, explained to him the ritual to be performed once a person wears the holy thread. A part of the ritual is the proper recitation of the Gayatri mantra. Explaining the significance of the mantra, Pandit Malaviya said, "Gayatri is like the divine Kamadhenu cow for a brahmin." (One who has Kamadhenu cow in his home will be able to get whatever he wishes). This holy thread is a symbol of Gayatri. Along with the thread which lies on the shoulder, chest, abdomen and the back, Mother Gayatri is ever present on you. By depending on her with faith and dedication, the goddess becomes pleased with you and blesses you with fulfilment.

After the holy-thread ceremony, Shriram returned with his father to Anwalkheda. On the way he continuously asked his father about the meaning of "Brahmin's Kamadhenu". Also, about why Gayatri is symbolised by the holy-thread when the images of other deities are made in clay or wood. While these images are established in temples, why is the image of Gayatri as a holy- thread worn from the shoulder to the waist? What is meant by faith and dedication? and many more questions in detail. Father Roopkishoreji, because of his fine grasp of the subject, was able to give proper and convincing answers which so much satisfied him that he was convinced about the Gayatri mantra and thus the seed of faithful worship was firmly planted in Shriram's (later Gurudev) mind.

Thus, a regular programme of Gayatri Upasana (dedicated worship) was started by Gurudev at the age of ten years. As directed by Pandit Malaviyaji he strictly observed the morning and evening timings as required of any devotee. This

programme continued unbroken throughout the life and later on the number of recitations were continuously increased, which was initially 5 rosaries of 108 beads in the mornings and evenings. Not only did Shriram start the Gayatri Upasana (worship) in earnest, but also started the study of Sanskrit language and scriptures in earnest from his father Roopkishoreji.

Thus, within next 4 years from the age of 10 to 14 Shriram mastered Sanskrit language and its grammar and also finished studying Shrimad Bhagwat, Ramayana, Mahabharat and other ancient scriptures. It is noteworthy here that this programme of studies continued non-stop upto June 1990 when Gurudev voluntarily cast off the mortal frame, and the study was not confined to the above-mentioned books only but books on almost every conceivable subject.

During this time, teenager Shriram started another activity which can be termed only as "revolutionary" because nobody had done it before viz adult-education. Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Shriram would gather the elders of the village and teach them reading and writing. For them, he used to bring books printed in big types. He also used to explain them about God's importance and the hidden power in the name of God and how one can achieve salvation through recitation of God's name. He also explained that the importance of writing God's name repeatedly is even more than uttering God's name, because with recitation, man's soul is awakened, but with the name of the Lord inscribed on it, even a stone can float on water. During the time of Lord Ram, the bears and monkeys had written Ram's name on stones and thrown them into the sea and they had started floating on water. He was so much able to convince the villagers that they became willing pupils. Within 18 months 40 elders learnt from him all that he had learnt in 3 years in Pandit Roopram's village-school.

In between the teenager Shriram made a gesture which was unprecedented in those days in 1923. This was his giving of medical aid to an "untouchable". This is the story of an elderly woman belonging to the "untouchable" community. Her name was Chhapko and because she was very advanced in age, teenager Shriram used to call her "Chhapko amma". She lived in one of the five huts in which members of her community lived at one end of Aanwalkheda. These people mainly did menial work in the house- holds in the village. Chhapko amma used to go to Shriram's house regularly for sweeping and cleaning the house. It so happened that she was absent for 5 days at a stretch. When she did not come for 5 days, the people in Gurudev's home thought of employing someone else.

But Shriram who later became known as Gurudev thought otherwise. He was suspecting that Chhapko was ill. He told his friends to give him company for visiting her. His friends were afraid because in the orthodox atmosphere in those days, going to the home of an untouchable was unacceptable and the elders would punish the children by beating them. But Shriram was undeterred and leaving the friends aside, purposefully started walking with sure steps to his Chhapko amma's home. When he reached her hut, he called out her name but there was no reply.

He opened the door and looked inside and found that Chhapko was lying unconscious. He went inside and again called out her name several times. He touched her forehead and found that she had high temperature. Recognising Shriram's voice she said in a strained voice, "Why have you come here? If someone sees you here, you will be in trouble. You will be punished at home". Shriram ignored it and suddenly saw her palm, found there was deep wound in it, and there was a foul small because pus-formaton had started. He scolded Chhapko amma that he is immediately bringing a medicated ointment.

Chhapko became mortally afraid and said, "No No, let it be, I will myself go to the hospital for treatment", but the hospital was 5 miles away. Shriram simply ignored her talk, went out and very soon brought the ointment and dressing-material. He cleaned the wound, applied the medicine and tied the bandage. Then he boiled herbal medicine and gave the extract to her for drinking. The thought of the son of the biggest Pandit of the village tenderly nursing her - an untouchable - made her very emotional and she started crying. The pain in the wound also reduced because of the dressing and while blessing the young Shriram she fell into a deep sleep.

The real test for Shriram was waiting for him when he returned home. He found family-people waiting for him with Gangajal (holy water from the river Ganga). In those days tradition demanded that a person who has defiled himself or herself by touching untouchable person, should first bathe in Gangajal and then enter home. Young Shriram was asked to take bath with Gangajal and then only enter home. Upon this, he said, "Arrange for large amounts of Gangajal because I shall be going to Chhapko amma to bandage her wound until it is healed and this will be for several days". On hearing thus, the elders severely scolded him and he was also not given dinner.

But this did not deter Shriram. Next day he went again and bandaged Chhapko's wound. The hearts of the elders melted a little. They arranged for him to stay in

the outhouse. They kept his lunch over there. Shriram kept aside some of it for himself, and took the remaining lunch with him and went to Chhapko's home. He fed her and came back and ate lunch. After one week's treatment, the wound started drying up. Chhapko amma started moving around. When Shriram was satisfied that the lady had fully recovered, he stopped going to her hut for treating her. Afterwards to satisfy his elders, he also bathed in Gangajal, although he repeatedly said that by serving Chhapko he had not become impure, but actually his mind has been cleansed. Even then if the home people insist on my taking bath with Gangajal, I do not lose anything in respecting their wish. At least I have done my duty.

Gurudev's programme of regular worship continued. Not only that, but actually increased vigorously. People gradually started understanding this young man's pure intention of serving others and his friends joined him. He formed a brigade of his friends and taught them first aid and treatment of common ailments such as colds, cough and fever by preparing herbal medicines. Since there was no hospital or government-dispensary in the village, Gurudev's service-brigade would go to anyone with illness and give treatment.

The medical-service by Shriram and his friends was not limited to human beings only. Cows, dogs, pigeons, sparrows and other birds and animals were also treated. Nobody knows how Shriram learned about medicines for animals, but he noted it down in his own handwriting and prepared several copies in poster-form and had these pasted on walls in surrounding villages. Shriram was given enthusiastic support by his friends and now their family- elders stopped coming in their way.

Once malaria spread in the village. That was the time when quinine was not available. Once malaria attacks a person, it makes the person very weak. Someone in the home had malaria and Taiji treated him with a boiled extract of herbal medicines. Shriram asked Taiji about the formula and through his friends gathered the ingredients and in a corner of the compound started preparing the extract, and he and his friends went from home to home and treating people. Within a week, malaria disappeared from the village. But young Shriram's work did not stop with eradicating malaria. He went a step further to work for its prevention and went from home to home to explain to people that disease spreads because of dirt and unhygienic living. The elders listened to him and started keeping their homes and streets clean and free from garbage.

THE DIVINE SPIRIT (DADA GURU) MANIFESTS (YEAR-1926)

At the time of Shriram's holy-thread ceremony Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had given a programme of worship and swaddhyay (study of scriptures and introspection) to him. And Shriram proved a worthy follower. He followed the programme thoroughly and with total sincerity. He got up at 4 o'clock in the morning and finished the morning prayers after 2 hours. After the morning prayers, Shriram devoted himself to social service in the form of medical help, helping people to read and write and

teaching hygiene to people. During the day he also spent time in studying the scriptures.

Those were also the days of the movement for India's freedom and young Shriram was also drawn towards the movement. As part of the movement, he continued doing the basic work of spreading literacy, teaching hygiene to the people and giving medical help to the people. But along with this work, his programme of worship never flagged and continued simultaneously.

The divine spirit manifests

For his worship, Gurudev used to sit in a separate room. In the fourth month after Deepavali, i.e. the Magh month Gurudev started spending more time in the pooja (worship) - room. The fifth day of the Magh month is known as Vasant Panchami meaning the fifth day of the spring season. On this day nature is in full bloom and this day is considered very auspicious, Marriages and other ceremonies are conducted on this day and yogis also consider this as an auspicious day for learning advanced techniques in the yogic science...

On the above auspicious day, the 15-Year-old Shriram felt a big surge of enthusiasm and inspiration. He went in the morning as usual and finished his prayers, and started meditating on Mother Gayatri and simultaneous reciting the required mantra. As soon as the required number off recitations was over, the room was suddenly filled with blinding light. It seemed as if many suns had shone simultaneously. Shriram could keep his eyes open for merely a moment and then was forced to close his eyes. He also forgot to recite the remaining prayers and rituals and wanted to cry out in fear but the voice could not come out.

Very soon the atmosphere became normal and a mild, yet brilliant form in the shape of a human being manifested. He had thick locks of interwined hair on his head and was completely nude. Yet, on seeing Him, one felt a feeling of reassurance. The fear felt earlier, disappeared. Shriram felt wonderfully elated

and immediately wanted to touch his feet (as a mark of respect) but He signalled to him to remain seated. The form came nearer and Shriram started receiving an unspoken message, which said that since many births in the past, this divine form is his guiding power. Staying in the Himalaya mountains in physical body in what is known as "Siddha Kshetra" (the place where souls who have achieved supernatural powers reside) such souls can create a Sukshma (ethereal) body and travel anywhere.

This divine ethereal form had come with a special message. This divine form did not say anything by mouth. Just kept his hand on Shriram's head and he felt as if his whole body became all ears. Every pore of his body became all started "hearing" and innumerable streams of messages flowed non-stop from the divine form. Several times Shriram' gestured to him to speak or to write but every time he felt as if the communication was to be without any utterance only.

The first effect of the divine-touch was to awaken the memory of the past births. Although the past births flashed quickly like a film the memory of three earlier lives specially came to mind. These were: 1) as Saint Kabir Kabirdas from 1398 to 1518 2) as Samarth Guru Ramdas from 1608 to 1682 and 3) as Ramkrishna Paramhans from 1836 to 1887. The common feature during above three periods was the exposure of hypocrisy and its removal, preparing great men and organising movements for revival of religion.

Saint Kabir Kabirdas (1398 - 1518)

Kabir was discarded after his birth by his mother near a pond because he was an illegitimate child. He was found there by a weaver and learned the trade from his adopted father while weaving he used to compose songs in praise of the Lord and also on the philosophy of life. He was also a strong critic of the general hypocrisy practised by religious leaders in the Hindu and Islamic societies of his time and thus courted enmity from both sides. The Hindu religious leaders externed him from the Hindu religious city of Kashi and the mullahs had him bound in iron-chains and thrown into the river. To everyone's surprise, the chains broke and Kabirdas came out unharmed. This brought him numerous followers from both religions.

When saint Kabir died, there was a dispute regarding the disposal of the body. The Hindus wanted to cremate the body and the Muslims wanted to bury the body. In short, when the shroud covering the body was lifted, only flowers were found and there was no trace of the body. The flowers were divided between

both sides. The Hindus cremated the flowers in the traditional manner and the Muslims buried them as per their custom. Both factions also erected monuments in his memory.

Samarth Guru Ramdas (1608 - 1682)

Popularly known as Swami Ramdas, he was born in Maharashtra. Under his guidance the Maratha warrior Shivaji Maharaj fought the wars of liberation against Mughal oppressors and later against the British. On establishing his kingdom, he surrendered it to his Guru Ramdas for proper administration. Swami Ramdas, himself an ascetic, returned the kingdom to Shivaji Maharaj and asked him to administer it as a precious heritage and to be ready for re-establishment of religion.

Shivaji obeyed his Guru's instruction, kept Guruji's wooden slippers on his throne as a symbol of the Guru's reign and ran the kingdom merely as his administrator. An important contribution of Swami Ramdas was the construction of 700 temples of Lord Hanuman who is symbolic of strength and fight against oppression. Adjacent to each temple, a gymnasium was also prepared. Thus, each temple helped in turning people towards religion and in preparing healthy youth as a force against invasion by marauders.

Ramkrishna Paramhans (1836 to 1887)

The memory of the above two lives flashed very fast on his Shriram's mind's screen. Then the scene suddenly changed to a small village in West Bengal where Ramkrishna was born in a small village. He was appointed as a priest in the Kali temple in Dakshineshwar in Calcutta. His devotion to the Goddess Kali was so intense that She used to manifest in front of him and take food offered by him. When the news somehow came to be known people started thronging to him for alleviation of their troubles. He did help them to the extent possible, but his real interest was in worshipping the Goddess and in preparing enlightened souls for spreading the message of God, not only in India but abroad also. One of his disciples was the famous Swami Vivekananda who spread the message of God in faraway U.S.A.

Ramkrishna Paramhans was a married ascetic and his life- partner Ma Shardamani was an equally enlightened soul. On being married, they decided to make their married life divine in the real sense of the word by observing celibacy and utilising the life for spiritual advancement and devotion to God only.

Because of constant invasion by the Mughals, Turks and Afghans and later on by the British, there was severe erosion in the practice of religion and in belief in God. Specially the western culture brought in a belief only in progress through science, materialism and atheism. Thus, there was widespread confusion, especially in the western educated youth. Swami Ramkrishna Paramhans wanted to counter this by preparing dedicated disciples such as Narendra (later Swami Vivekanand). Swami Vivekanand spread the message of God and spiritual philosophy in many countries and founded the Ramkrishna Mission which even to-day does the work of spreading God's message and also renders help in natural calamities in India.

The Guru Gives The Divine

All these three lives flashed before 15-year-old Shriram like lightning. The instructions flowed from the divine spirit or Dada Guru. The instructions were as follows: The successful worship of Gayatri Mantra for 24 years for achieving divine powers. Every day minimum worship for 4 to 6 hours and 24 lakhs (24,00,000) recitations to be completed in one year only. This process to be repeated for next 23 years, thus at the end of 24 years, the number of recitations will be 24 times 24,00,000 i.e. 576,00,000 total recitations, over 24 years. While performing these recitations, the following to be observed -- 'titiksha' (total forbearance). The food to consist of only ‘java' a very lightweight grain and buttermilk made from cow's milk only (not of buffalo or any other milch- animal) To sleep only on the ground or flat wooden board.

To lead a disciplined life. All personal work like washing clothes, cleaning the room and the smallest personal work to be done by self only. In between, some time to be spent in the freedom movement. As mentioned earlier the purpose of performing the 5,76,00,000 Gayatri mantras within the above framework was to achieve the divine powers for bringing about an awakening in people for transforming the era. To keep alive the determination for the above performance, a holy-Deepak - a very small cup-like wick-lamp to be kept lighted without a break for 24 years and with ghee made from cow's milk only. All writing, speech, transactions and behaviour to be dedicated only to the above goal. In between, when called, Shriram to visit the siddhabhoomi (the place from where the divine spirit came) in the Himalaya mountains.

Once the 24-year-long penance was completed, then Sahastrakundiya Gayatri Mahayagna to be performed. In the meanwhile, a centre called the Gayatri Tirth (pilgrimage centre) to be established and to make this place the centre for all

activities. As a pious and true disciple, young Shriram accepted these with a sense of dedication and obedience. No sooner the instructions were over the Divine Manifestation vanished and from that very moment Shriram, at the young age of 15 years started on the path of his momentous and severe penance of 24 long years.

Shriram's Mentor, the Divine Dada Guru

The Divine Dada Guru in his physical body lives in the unreachable parts of the Himalayas. His name is Sarveshwaranand... Because he has miraculous powers, he is able to go anywhere to guide his pupils but his abode is in the Himalayas in the company of souls with divine powers who are performing severe penances for spiritual advancement. This place is said to be somewhere between the peaks of Gourishankar and Kanchanjanga mountains in the Himalayan range. As described by Shriram (now rev. Gurudev), Swami Sarveshwaranand is penance incarnate, with the light of penance emanating from his body.

He told Shriram that their relationship has been over many births as Guru and disciple. He also told him that the duties in the three lives as Kabir, Ramdas and Ramkrishna Paramhans were greater in magnitude each time, but the duties during this lifetime and the penance required were more severe. The reason for them was the very complex and dangerous challenges ahead. Thes challenges were of such a vast magnitude, that the powers required to face these challenges demanded penance of an extremely severe nature and a very long duration.

More about Guru Sarveshwaranand

From the tit-bits occasionally mentioned by our Gurudev, Guru Sarveshwaranand's body is 700-years old. Because he is a 'siddha' i.e. with divine powers, he is able to create a new body at will, but does not do so unless required for a very special purpose. Available literature shows that the famous sufi saint Gul Hasan Shah of Delhi had seen Swami Sarveshwaranand about 150 years ago in Haridwar. He has written in his book "Rasul Gosiya" that this nude yogi is able to change his body's figure colour and shade as per his own wish.

Swami Amrutanand of Gujarat in his book "Siddha Anushasan" has written that he had met Swami Sarveshwaranand in 1922. He had gone into an impenetrable place in Himalaya and saw the reverend Swami Sarveshwaranand. Amrutanand had lost his way and was not able to decide which way he should go because everywhere there was snow. The signs and symbols which he had noted at his

last camp were somehow lost. He felt that now he would not be able to return and would be dying there only.

During those moments of uncertainty, as if by God's grace, a well-built nude form manifested there and showed him the way. He also showed him some secrets of worship and explained that one does not have to go looking for Divine souls, who possess miraculous powers and they are not found when one tries to search for them. One has to be deserving to meet them. Once you have purified yourself to the desired extent, these divine souls will search you out and meet you. Swami Amrutanand has written that he could not go further and had to return.

That such a place exists has been corroborated by modern seekers also, among whom Madame Blavatsky, the propounder of the science of theosophy is well-known and so also the famous Paul Brunton who has written in detail about occult experiences in various parts of the world including in the pyramids in Egypt and with various yogis and rishis in India in his book "In search of secret India" Besides them there is Led Beater, Paramhans Yoganand who has written his world famous: Autobiography of a Yogi, and who taught yoga until his death in the U.S.A. and also other modern authors like Swami Vishuddhanand Mahamahopadhyaya, Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj and Swami Ram Tirth who has written the book "Living with the Himalayan Masters".

According to them this place stretches from Yamnotri Glaciers to Nandadevi in the Himalayas. Nobody can go there in the physical body. The Divine souls either leave the place and meet the invitees outside the divine land or if someone has been invited there, he will have to go there in an ethereal form only.

Gurudev has said many times to people close to him that his mentor the Dada Guru is always with him. They have found that Gurudev and the Divine power guiding him, i.e. Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji, are one and the same. They may appear separate to the human eye, but they are one and the same. The experience of Maganbhai Gandhi in this context is worth mentioning. Gurudev used to keep on saying that the Divine power guiding him is always with him. "The power is with me at every step and tells me whatever that I have to do".

Maganbhai had tremendous faith in Gurudev. He insisted with Gurudev to show him his Divine Guru. Gurudev gave him a typical reply saying, “Look at me and experience him inside me only" But Maganbhai's whim would not leave him and he strongly insisted again with Gurudev for a darshan (view) of the Divine Dada Guru. To satisfy his disciple, the ever-loving kindly Gurudev told him that on a

certain day at a certain place his GURU would come to the annakshetra (a place where food or flour or grams etc. are distributed freely to all).

He would be wearing white dress, take the free food and proceed further. If he felt like it, he could go and see him there. For recognising him, he told him to remember the same picture which is with most of the devotees. Gurudev said that the figure, face and the long hair etc. would all be just the same as in the picture, but the only difference would be that HE would not be nude (as in the picture) with the devotees. Gurudev also advised that he should immediately return after seeing him and not to go deeper into the mountains.

At that time Maganbhai had gone on the "Char-dham-yatra" (pilgrimage of the four very sacred pilgrimage-centres) in the Uttarakhand area in Uttar Pradesh state. He reached the place indicated in Uttarkashi and stood outside the free-food centre. The same Divine Form clad in white came there. He even stared at Maganbhai, who recognised properly that HE is the same as described by Gurudev. The Divine Form took the free-food and started going downwards on the bank of the river Ganga. Maganbhai forgot Gurudev's instruction to return after seeing him, and not to proceed further. He became curious to see where the Divine Form was going.

He followed the Divine Guru. The Divine Guru walked with great speed and Maganbhai found it very difficult to keep up with him. Once He even disappeared. Maganbhai could not understand as to where he had gone. In trying to search for him, Maganbhai went to a cave and found that a figure clad in white was sitting on a stone. Maganbhai immediately went in front of him, and when he saw Him, he stood dazed. He was none other than Gurudev Pandit Shriram Sharma, the very same Gurudev whom he had met 5 days earlier at Mathura and noted the address of the Uttarkashi free-food centre.

Gurudev was smiling benignly. He said, "Now at least you will believe that I and the Divine Power guiding me are one and the same. Now never be curious again and do not insist on knowing more than what has been shown to you". After saying thus, the Divine Form disappeared. Maganbhai stood there with his mouth agape. This miraculous event convinced and fulfilled him. He did not proceed for his char-dham yatra, returned to Mathura, fell at the feet of Rev. Gurudev, expressed deep sorrow and begged to be forgiven, and of course Gurudev, benevolent and large-hearted as usual, consoled Maganbhai. Suffice to say here that many people have experienced this at different times and felt the unseen presence of the Dada Guru along with Gurudev Pandit Shriram Sharma.

GURUDEV PARTICIPATES IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE (1922 TO 1937)

Much before meeting the Divine Guru Sarveshwaranand Shriram had started his pioneering work of fighting against bad and restrictive customs in the society and serving the downtrodden. Around 1922 the freedom movement had gained momentum and Gurudev's activities also increased.

An impetus to his activities was from Swami Dayanand Saraswati's “Arya Samaj” movement which was becoming popular in those days. Swami Dayanand was also a yogi with knowledge of the scriptures and he too had started much earlier a movement for eradicating false beliefs and evil customs from the society and for awakening the people from their stupor and backwardness. Shriram joined the local branch of the Arya Samaj and started taking part in the yagnas and Satsang programmes (discussions on social and religious reforms). These discussions centred on such subjects as national economic development, one's duty, independence as well as social reforms.

One slogan of Swami Dayanand had become very popular in those days. It was, "Compared to the best administration by a foreign ruler, the worst rule by our own people is preferable". There were many reasons for this slogan's popularity. In the nearby Agra cantonment, there were British army officers. They used to harass the local people by whip-lashing them for fun while coming and going, suddenly rushing their horse on people, and molesting women. The people were so much afraid of then that on seeing them they used scurry into by-lanes or hid behind horse- buggies.

One day 12-year-old Shriram was talking with an elderly relative in a side-street near a shop. At this time on the main road, a young housewife was passing by with her brother-in-law and a British army officer was coming on horseback. He halted the horse and called the young woman near him. The young woman was intelligent and realised that the army officer would humiliate her. The brother-in-law gathered up courage and asked the officer what the matter was.

Instead of replying, the officer rudely hit him on the back with the butt of his gun. The youth fell down on the spot. Again, the officer hit the butt on his chest and the youth started writhing in agony. The young woman found herself helpless. She started running away in fear. The officer ran his horse behind her shouting, 'where are you going?" The girl ran into a side-lane. The lane was narrow so it was difficult for the horse to run swiftly inside. Even then the rider entered the lane, but the horse was forced to trot and the girl could run swiftly.

The army officer got down from his horse and started running after her. The lane was opening on the other side onto a road.

12-year-old Shriram was standing there talking to an elder. He saw the helpless woman and the officer running after her. Shriram was able to grasp the situation very quickly and lifted a stone, took aim and throw it at the officer without fear of consequences. The stone hit the officer hard and he fell down. He started shouting, "Who hit me, I shall kill him, who is he?" etc. and got up but there was no strength in him and he could not walk properly. The Britisher started shouting and threatening the shopkeepers and passer-by for revealing the name of the stone-thrower, but nobody told anything. The young woman, all the while, remained hidden in a safe place and finally the Britisher limped away.

The whole incident was an unbelievable experience for the meek villagers. In those days it was unthinkable to oppose even an Indian soldier, whereas here an English officer was opposed. The news spread with lightening-speed throughout Agra. Of course, only four or five people knew that this act was not of same reckless youth but that of a 12-year-old boy. Immediately after this incident, Shriram returned home and sat in his worship-room for a long time.

After nearly 45 minutes he came out with the idea of forming a brigade of boys. Immediately he contacted his friends and organised a team and they decided that they would oppose op- pression where ever they found it. Initially a daily meeting was held later on once a week. In these meetings, the ways to oppose oppression, methods of protection and ways of helping the op- pressed were discussed. The team, with 8 members in the beginning, finally had 20 members.

These boys not only opposed the white officers, but also opposed anyone in the villages who would torment anyone. Sometimes they were even forced to intervene in such cases as wife-beating or some young men harassing their parents. But their main aim was to counter the excesses of the white officers.

But Shriram's campaign was not only against man's cruelty against man but also for the removal of pain in the society due to any cause. If a person had been cruel in the past, but if he was suffering due to any cause, Shriram was equally compassionate to him also. One incident illustrates this attitude of Shriram very well, i.e. the case of patwari Hubbalal. A patwari is a clerk in charge of land-records in a collector's office.

At the time of this story, Hubbalal was not in service but even then, was called by the title of patwari. In his days, Aanwalkheda village was in his jurisdiction,

and the job used to be hereditary. He was extremely greedy and instead of collecting the required levy, he would squeeze so much out of the ignorant farmer as to keep him in dire circumstances. If some farmer protested, the patwari would use threat and coercion and ultimately ruin the farmer. And such cases were many so that many of these farmers, who once owned lands, were forced to become labourers.

In those days Shriram had started going to Agra and his team used to be called to various parts of the district for assistance. Once someone gave some clothes and blankets for distributing to the handicapped as well as people in distress in Aanwalkheda. The team started preparing a list of such people and one of the names was Hubbalal's. Hubbalal whose very nanie made people tremble, was himself a victim of paralysis and was lying on a cot, unattended by anyone. His body was caked with dirt and flies were buzzing on this dirt. Hubbalal did not have even the strength to drive away the flies, and would go on crying throughout the day.

When Hubbalal saw Shriram and his friends, he blurted out, "See children, How God has punished me for my sins". Shriram consoled him saying, 'Lalaji, do not worry, pray to God, we are here to serve you" After that the children bathed. Hubbalal, changed his clothes and cleaned his room. Not only that, as long as he lived, the boys looked after him very well and served him.

The freedom-movement started by congress had spread to Agra and Aanwalkheda also. Shriram's family-members were aware of Shriram's fight against cruelty by the Britishers as well as the locals and they did not wish that Shriram should become actively involved in Congress's movement, because his father had died, he was the only son and by now he was married also. His mother and seniors in the family were of the opinion that Shriram should now settle down in life, and take up the traditional vocation of priesthood. Mother Taiji also used to put mental pressure by reminding Shriram of his promise that as long as she lived, he will not leave her to become a monk.

But Shriram had other thoughts. He used to be disappear for the whole day. The divine spirit, viz Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji among other instructions, had told him to devote a few years to the struggle for India's independence. Even before he was active in his own way, but after getting Dada Guru's order, he worked with more enthusiasm. His family-elders were afraid that he might run away from home to join the freedom-fighters or else the police might arrest him for joining the freedom-movement.

By that time, the national leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak had given the slogan, "Freedom is my birth-right and we shall rest only after getting it." This slogan had given a tremendous boost to the public. Freedom- fighters were known as "Swarajis" (Swarajis = those who want independence for the country) Shriram's family developed a strategy for keeping him away from the Swarajis. They started keeping a strict watch on him during day-time. At night, a big padlock would be used on the main door to prevent Shriram from running away.

Shriram was upset because of the watch kept on him and the daily admonitions. He thought it better to leave the home for a few days. One night he got up at 2 a.m. and filled the lota (vessel for carrying water) and told the gate-keeper to open the gate because he wanted to go for toilet. He left the lota at the door and went by different routes for 12 hours and reached Agra.

A programme of enlisting volunteers was going on. He enlisted himself. He met such pioneering workers as Jagan Prasad Rawat, Gangasinh Daddu and Udhamsinh. The newspapers of those days report that all the four addressed meetings at many places, met a large member of people, prepared and distributed pamphlets, visited villages and created an atmosphere for struggle for independence.

Gurudev (the then Shriram) had also written songs in praise of patriotism to inspire people to become bold and fight for freedom. These songs used to be sung at the village. Some of them had become extremely popular. One of these was regularly sung in the dawn-processions and meetings in various towns of Agra district. It began with the lines which meant, "Whoever be your enemy, he will be destroyed. The sky will burst with the cries of 30 crore people (Indians)." The song was also printed in the newspaper "Sainik" published from Agra city. In the songs created by him, he used the full of pen-name “mutt" which in Hindi means "mad with joy".

In 1931 when Shriram was 20 years old, freedom fighter Bhagat Singh was sentenced to death and hanged. This created widespread unrest in the country and the then government banned processions, but the people were furious against the atrocities of the rulers and broke the ban with renewed vigour. Panditji, i.e. Shriram was also arrested for breaking the ban and spent some time in jail.

Hardly a month had passed after his release from jail when Shriram announced that he would take out a flag procession in nearby Jharkhi village. The

administration took this announcement seriously and banned any procession including marriage-pro- cessions in Jharkhi. This was a challenge to Shriram and he called congress volunteers from the nearby villages and decided that they would take out a procession with the tricolour flag.

In the month of June 1931, one day about 35 young men gathered in the village-square. When the magistrate got the news, he sent on equal number of policemen to disperse the gathering. Some of the policemen and the youth were from the same villages and knowing each other. They tried to reason with the boys and said, "Go back to your homes. Why are you against our jobs and against your lives?" Shriram replied, "Sir, we are not fomenting a rebellion. Just allow us to form a line so that we can proceed. That's all that we want.

The head-constable said, “All right: proceed. But don't create any noise" (by noise he meant slogan- shouting) The boys made a line-formation with pairs of boys standing behind each other. Shriram stood ahead of all the others. As soon as the line was formed Shriram took out the tricolour-flag from his cap, took out a cane hidden under his shirt and in a flash slipped the flag on the cave and raised it. The boys standing behind, shouted, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" Vande Mataram (salutations to the mother), our flag will always fly high" No sooner these were shouted, the police became active and started showering blows with their sticks.

The head-constable even advised the policemen, "Beat carefully, do not hit hard. These are our children". But the policemen, ever-ready and keen to beat, started beating mercilessly. The main target was Shriram. The stick with the flag on it was in his hand so the police started beating hand. His grip on the stick slackened and in the flurry of confusion he caught the flag in his mouth but did not allow the flag to fall to the ground. The police hated the flag more than the boys. So, they hit on his mouth so that

Shriram would be in great pain and would let go of the flag so it could fall to the ground. He did not loosen his mouth's grip on the flag and received more blows on his mouth and fell unconscious into the mud. Then a policeman snatched away the flag from his mouth. Then all the policemen went away with the snatched flag. Some of the boys who had received less blows, lifted Shriram from the mud and took him home and tried to revive him. A doctor was called. He opened the firmly closed mouth, and found a piece of cloth of the flag. still in the mouth. This was because Shriram had firmly held the tricolour flag between his teeth and when the police snatched the flag, he had kept his teeth firmly clenched. Everyone was wonderstruck.

Gurudev went to jail for a Second time in 1933. The Congress organisation was banned at that time but the leaders had decided to hold a session at Calcutta and gave a directive that congress- workers from all over the country must come. They were also directed to court arrest, if necessary, but they must show their resistance to the British government. They should preferably avoid arrest and come by indirect routes. The government also sealed all entry-points to Calcutta and the police were given powers to arrest any outsider on suspicion. Many groups from Agra started for Calcutta. The last batch started under Shriram Mutt's leadership. They disguised themselves and entered Bengal province.

But they were arrested at Asansol station and kept in an open compound in a temporary jail where Shriram met such Congress stalwarts as Madan Mohan Malaviya, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Kanhaiyalal Khadiwala and others and Pandit Shriram had an opportunity to meet them and listen to their discussions for the future plans of the movement.

It may be recalled here that Pandit Malaviya had initiated him into the sacred-thread ceremony as a boy of ten and when Shriram met him in the jail and reminded him of that, Malaviyaji was overcome with emotion because Shriram's father Roopkishore Sharma was a close friend of Madan Mohan Malaviya. Malaviyaji offered him to come to Kashi Vishwavidyalaya (Banaras University) for higher education, but Shriram said that now he wanted to learn in the school of the freedom-movement and when all the prisoners were released Malaviyaji recommend to Shriram to visit him at home whenever he wished and also asked him to be in touch regularly.

Upon returning home, Shriram found an anxious and sobbing Taiji (mother) waiting for him. Shriram told her not to worry and asked her to remember what his father Roopkishreji used to say, i.e. Gayatri Mata (mother) in the form of Gayatri mantra is a Kamadhenu (the divine cow who gives you whatever you ask from her). Being a profound believer in religion, Taiji quietened down but as a mother her heart was not willing to believe Shriram and she asked him that whatever happened, he must be at home on every Thursday. Shriram faithfully obeyed this request from his mother till 1936, except for the time that he was in jail.

Now his routine was to go into villages and hamlets to spread the word for India's freedom. Along with this he also took part in Arya Samaj's social reform movement such as eradication of child-marriages, untouchability and belief in caste-system. He also believed in widow-remarriage and tried to promote it

where possible. In those days child-marriages were very common and even Shriram was married at the age of fourteen. That was his first marriage. He himself taught the alphabets to his wife Saraswatidevi so that she would be able to gain knowledge by reading books and also scriptures.

In the days when he started spreading Arya Samaj movement's message for social reform, an event happened which shook the entire village. An innocent 32-year-old widow from a good family was somehow lured by a rascal and she became pregnant. Quiet attempts at abortion proved futile and the woman tried to commit suicide but was prevented by her parents from doing so. Gradually the tale spread and young Shriram came to know about this tragedy.

He immediately contacted the hapless parents of this unfortunate widow and persuaded them for her re-marriage to a decent and willing man. He also assured them that he himself will search for a suitable man willing to marry this young lady. The parents were very much relieved that some solution was now possible and a capable person like Shriram was going to help. Shriram them. contacted the Arya Samaj branch at Mathura and explained everything in detail to the head of the branch. As luck would have it, one of the active workers of the Samaj was a 35- year-old young widower having two children.

Shriram told the full story to him and also told him that the widow was a decent and cultured woman but had fallen into the trap of a lecher. The young widower became willing to marry this lady and the marriage was performed in the Arya Samaj temple. Not only that but he treated her with honour and adopted her child as his own and gave him all the love. This couple's children are now living respectable lives.

As part of the untouchability-removal programme, Shriram also started performing religious rituals for the untouchables and the lower castes. One such person used to clean the stable in Shriram's mansion and also groom the horses. Once he felt like having the Satyanarayan Katha performed at his home. This is a ritual in which Lord Vishnu (Satyanarayana) is first worshipped ritually and then a series of stories of his benevolence are recited and then fruits and sweets are offered to the Lord and distributed to the gathered devotees.

This horse-groom was in a dilemma because normally the orthodox brahmin priests used to avoid going to the low-castes. So, he requested Pandit Shriram and could not believe his ears when Shriram agreed to perform the Satyanarayan Katha and told him what materials he should keep ready, and also told him to be

ready next day after taking a bath. He again asked Shriram whether he would came.

Shriram affirmed again and again and gave instructions in detail. The horse-groom was very much elated and went to his mates and invited them and also invited his neighbours. The next day Shriram went to his home with the holy-book of the Satyanarayan katha and the paraphernalia required. The katha was performed to the elation of all and the prasad (the fruits and sweets) offered to the deity was distributed to the gathering. Suddenly he saw that a few Thakur-caste brahmins were running towards them with big sticks, because they did not approve of the Satyanarayan-katha ritual at the place of an “untouchable" person.

Shriram immediately stood up and faced them. He told them that he had recited the holy scripture and not committed any sin. One elder wanted to catch hold him and threaten him. Immediately Shriram collected all the paraphernalia that he had brought and simply went pass the bellicose Thakur, and hid himself among standing crops in the fields. The onlookers were stupefied. When he returned home Shriram was scolded.

Shriram replied, “We are brahmins. It is our job to spread the message from the holy scriptures I have done that only. What is wrong in that?" The family people realised that when Shriram had decided on a course of action, there was no point in arguing against it, and kept quiet. His village-people loved him also, because in times of dire need if no one came forward to help, Shriram would immediately come forth without fear of consequences and help. Once he actually plunged himself into a house which was on fire. The incident is as follows:

There was a money-lender called Guljarilal in the village. One day somehow his house was on fire. Those were the days when the houses were not built with cement and steel. His home was amud-and-bricks structure with a thatched roof. Therefore, the entire house was lit with fire in no time. It is human nature that. during such calamities a man thinks of saving himself only. Thus except for his son's wife, others were able to escape the fire, but the wife was trapped inside. Outside the house, neighbours started the hard work of extinguishing the fire. Shriram came with his friends to help but first he asked whether everyone had come out safely. He learned that the wife was trapped inside.

Shriram looked at the door. Burning bamboos were lying there blocking the entrance. To enter from there was inviting trouble and getting trapped inside.

But Shriram decided immediately and without worrying for his life brought a ladder from the opposite house. He rested the ladder on the burning wall and leapt inside. There were 5 rooms in the house and somehow, he searched out the unconscious woman after some 5-7 minutes and carried her out. Others brought cot from a neighbour, the unconscious woman was laid out on the cot and immediately medical help was given.

He was equally keen to help animals in distress. It was in the year 1928 that he saw some butchers bringing two lame cows for killing and selling their flesh. He asked them the price for the cow. They told they had paid 28 rupees. Immediately Shriram went to Guljarilal and took a loan of Rs. 35/- and rescued the cows from the remaining seven rupees he arranged for a bullock-cart and hay and with the help of friends, loaded the cows on the cart and brought the cows to Hathras town and arranged for their shelter in the local free relief-camp for such cattle within one week he cleared the debt of Guljarilal.

The movement spearheaded by congress increased and people started cutting telephone-wires, stopping rail-traffic and burning imported cloth. Shriram became totally involved and remained away from home. He used to move in and around Mathura and Agra to make propaganda for independence and self-government. In those days the newspaper "Sainik" was the centre of independence movement. After release from the Asansol-jail Shriram started working there. He started by proof-reading and after a few days shared editing also. The proprietor of the newspaper was one Mr. Paliwal and most of his employees were freedom-fighters. His first experience of Gurudev's strength came with a crisis.

The Government had marked out "Sainik" newspaper and the employees for victimisation. The government's officers hatched a plan to force the paper to close down. They arrested some reporters and excited the press-workers to go on strike. There was hardly any staff in the press. Gurudev single handedly edited, composed and proof-read the matter and even wrote some articles.

Paliwalji was out of station. He returned after two days and somehow brought some order in the press and made the situation normal within a week, and Gurudev handled 50 to 75 percent of the work. Paliwalji was highly impressed and urged Gurudev to be always with him. Gurudev was not sure about the future direction of his life and so did not wish to commit himself. So, he told Paliwalji that he would not give a promise but assured him co-operation and satisfied Paliwalji with his frankness.

Gurudev was around 25 when he was arrested for the third time. He was not involved in any sabotaging activities. He had become a disciplined Congress-worker and was involved only in carrying out the projects planned by the party (i.e. social reforms, cottage industries etc). His dynamism and dedication had actually made the government officers anxious. Mr Martin, the CID inspector in his report to the Government had mentioned that Shriram has joined Congress but if he were to join revolutionaries, he can cause a lot of harassment. But he is very active and this causes doubts about his intentions.

On the basis of this report, it was decided to arrest Gurudev. 'His past was reviewed and what came out was that Shriram is a very polite and prideless worker. His liking is to be a volunteer only. It was also revealed in the report that once the senior Congress-leader B.V. Keskar asked Paliwalji to recommend a dedicated volunteer to him. Paliwalji gave this task to Gurudev. Instead of searching for such a worker, Gurudev volunteered himself to work for Keskar.

Paliwalji was not ready for this because he wanted Gurudev as his own assistant. Somehow Keskar was able to persuade Paliwal to release Gurudev because he liked him very much. Gurudev helped to hide keskar many times during police-raids. Inspector Martin wrote all this in his report and said that Shriram's politeness and modesty is a part of his style of working and said that hiding behind it is strong anger (against the British).

One more proof was given to prove Gurudev's deep involvement in the freedom movement's activities. One Lause in the Gandhi-Irwin pact was the waiving of levy from the farmers. In those days the command for the United Provinces (now the state of Uttar Pradesh) was given by the Congress to Govind Vallabh Pant, who called for levy statistics for Agra. It so happened that statistics were not available on time and when these were sent by rail, the train suffered an accident, so they could not reach the destination.

So at the Agra session of the Congress, it was decided to collect fresh figures and Pandit Shriram was given the task, because he was familiar with the entire territory and within just one week finished the task with the help of his friends! This astounded Govind Vallabh Pant who was a very astute and venerable Congress leader, He called Pandit Shriramji to meet him. When Gurudev met him, Govind Vallabh Pant asked him to take up a responsible post in the Congress organisation. The reply stunned G. B. Pant even more.

Gurudev said with modesty that he wanted to serve as a humble volunteer. This was conveyed to Gandhiji who said that India would gain independence in less than a month if every district had one such worker.

C. I. D. Inspector Martin mentioned this above quote in his report, and said that it was risky to keep such an active worker free. Thus, Martin ordered that under any pretext Shriram must be kept in jail and Shriram was falsely accused of raising the Congress- flag on a government building and rousing the people against Government, and was jailed.

This third term in jail lasted for 12 months. But in jail also Shriam's daily routine remained normal. He would arise early, finish his bath and ritual prayers and then carry out the allotted work. As a precaution he was shifted from jail to jail in such places as Agra, Lucknow and Allahabad. This gave him an opportunity to meet important people. He was also kept with notorious criminals, but was unmoved and in fact put the time available to good use, and learned English. from very meagre resources, and from others knowing English, learned it within just 45 days. He also learnt Bhojpuri and Urdu in jail.

On release from jail, Guruji returned home to a hero's welcome. His family-people were now reconciled to his being away from home. So, his mother Taiji asked him, "For how many days have you come?" He replied, "I am going again day after to- morrow. Taiji asked, "Then why did you come at all?" Gurudev replied, "You know, tomorrow is Thursday, so I must remain to give you company. Taiji smiled and asked again," Where will you go now?" Gurudev said, "To Gandhi baba's ashram (hermitage). I will be there for a few days and then come back.

Taiji said, "We have heard that Gandhi baba wears only a lion-cloth and makes anyone who goes to him a baba (ascetic) like himself. Now it was Gurudev's turn to smile. He said, "Yes Taiji, I will become Gandhi baba. If you do not wish, I will not go." Immediately Taiji said, "No, no, I will not stop you. Go by all means and become a proper Gandhi baba, "then she muttered to herself, "He is going only to became an ascetic, not some dacoit or money lender or Hubbalal. She hated all three.

So, Gurudev proceeded to Ahmedabad with his mother's blessings. He had no difficulty in reaching Gandhiji's ashram and there learnt many things about Gandhiji's personality. In brief, Gandhiji was a strict disciplinarian and expected all the visitors to follow the rules which were prescribed for all inmates and visitors. All permanent inmates were supposed to maintain a diary of their

routines and Gandhiji used to check these periodically. In addition, Gandhiji was a stickler for cleanliness and everyone was expected to maintain a spick-and-span cleanliness. The visitors were also given various types of work during their stay-kitchen-duty or washing clothes or bathrooms or latrines, sweeping the compound and so on.

Another thing which Gurudev came to know was that Gandhiji met each and every person who wanted to meet him but rarely gave more time. If one was given 5 minutes, that person was considered very lucky, so the visitor had to keep his points ready for presentation to Gandhiji. Those who wanted to meet Gandhiji had to give their names to Gandhiji's secretaries & the list was passed on to Gandhiji who would decide when to call the visitor.

After reading the rules for the visitor, Gurudev mentally summarised them as follows: "Faith in God and good use of time, labour and available means." It was also compulsory for every visitor to attend the morning and evening prayers. Gurudev decided to follow all the rules willingly and strictly.

Gurudev gave his name to one of the secretaries regarding his desire to meet Gandhiji and his name was duly passed on to Gandhiji. Gurudev was also given the duty of cleaning the latrines, sweeping the corridors, and the compound and also to fill the water for the bathrooms and fill the drinking water in every visitor's room.

Gurudev was used to hard work and got easily absorbed in the work given to him. He waited for Gandhiji to call him and thought he would be called in a day or two. He was not called after a wait for 4 days. This stretched to 7 days, still he was not called. He checked with the secretary and was informed that Gandhiji's personal secretary Mahadev Bhai Desai had passed on his name to Gandhiji. Finally on the 11th day he was informed that the following day Gandhiji would meet him during his morning walk.

The unusual feature of this meeting was that unlike the 4 - 5 persons accompaning Gandhiji, only Gurudev was there, that means, this became an exclusive interview. Gandhiji immediately said to him, "So you are Shriram" and warmly laid his hand on his shoulder, and said," Pant had told me about you. you worked for gathering the levy-figures. I was very happy to learn that. I have heard that you like running around. Increase the sphere of your work. Think of taking up big responsibilities. But Gurudev modestly declined, saying that he wanted to remain an humble volunteer only.

The summary of the talk was that Gandhiji was thinking of the future i.e. the work after independence and for that along with political awakening, the society had to be awakened morally and culturally, the last two being more important than political awakening, and asked that Gurudev should take up this work. During the morning-walk Gandhiji also asked him in detail about his family and before going back to his room, told him that he could stay in the ashram as long as he liked and he could walk in to his room without hesitation whenever he (Shriram) wanted to.

RIGOROUS PENANCE AND PROXIMITY (1926-1937)

We have seen in chapter III that at his age of fifteen, the divine spirit of Dada Guru or Swami Sarveshwaranand manifested be- fore Shriram in the spring season of 1926 on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchami. In India Vasant panchami is the official day signifying the onset of the spring season. We have also seen earlier that Sarveshwaranandji in his ethereal form silently passed on instructions without uttering a single word. A miracle happens.

We have also read in chapter III that a divine fragrance was felt by Gurudev. This was not personal to Gurudev only. The fragrance had spread through the house and it was so different from that of the daily incense sticks that they were attracted to Gurudev's prayer-room. They wanted to find out the new incense stick or other fragrant -wood which may have been used. To their surprise they found nothing, and saw Gurudev in prayer and quietly closed the doors and went away.

But the miracle that happened was that in the place of the old Deepak a new deepak was there and that too of a different shape. The old deepak could hold ghee (butter oil) for the wick for about 75 minutes. But in this deepak, the ghee could last for 4-6 hours. Shriram was still in a dazed state so he did not pay much attention to the new deepak, but immediately followed Dada Guru's instructions to keep the deepak continuously lighted. So, he prepared a new wick and poured ghee into the new deepak. When he was lighting the wick, he could feel the presence of Dada Guru. That deepak lighted in 1926 is still continuing uninterrupted since 70 years at Shantikunj.

And then the resolve took place for the 24 years recitation of Gayatri Mantra at the rate of 24 lakh every year and Gurudev started the recitation immediately. The first day's recitation lasted for five hours. This was far too long compared to the daily time used in prayer. He did not come out at the expected hour and family members thought that Shriram had fallen asleep.

Father Roopkishoreji peeped inside two-three times. When he found son Shriram in prayers, he was happy but was also surprised that Shriram was sitting for such a long time. When Shriram came out of the prayer-room, father Roopkishoreji asked, "You sat for a very long time today?" Shriram replied "From now on it will be a daily routine." Roopkishoreji knew about these types of vows been taken by people who wanted to advance spirituality.

So, he asked, "Have you decided on ""purushcharan (repetation of any mantra for a certain and definite number of times.) Shriram nodded in affirmation. Father looked at him with a mixture of wonder, pride and joy, did not say anything. Gurudev also put into action the prescribed diet of flat bread (roti) made out of the very light cereal grain called “jav” and butter milk.

(No other item of food except the above two.) Soon as the recitation gained momentum, for greater achievement, this turned to first feeding the grain to the cow and next day taking out the same grain from the cow-dung, then washing it, drying it, grinding it and then preparing the bread from the milled grain. Also, a noteworthy aspect was that Gurudev started taking the meal only once a day.

The routine also changed. From 3 a.m. to sunrise, Gayatri recitation. Exactly one year after this routine, exactly on the Vasant Panchami day, once again he felt the inspiration that something unusual was about to happen, and the divine fragrance smelt earlier manifested once again. Soon he started "hearing" Dada Guru's voice telling him to go to Himalaya mountains, that his Gurudev was inviting him there.

He was also "told" that he will have to spend some time with Dada Guru and the future programme will be decided there. Shriram was undecided at first, but this lasted for only a short while. He decided on that very day to leave, packed some clothes and told the people at home that he will be going out for some time, but this time the journey was not in connection with freedom-movement or any business.

That first journey to the Himalayas was very tough. In Those days one could go with some ease only upto Rishikesh. From there to Dev-Prayag, the journey was on foot. only. From there to Uttarkashi the journey was by motor-car. After that once again on foot, and then the entire Uttarakhand on foot from the point of view of journey, this place has also been difficult to reach. Even today for going to Kedarnath and Yamnotri, miles have to be covered by foot only.

On reaching, Gurudev took only the necessary material for the journey because the journey ahead was at a big height, much above the sea-level. On reaching a certain height, he found that his pack was too heavy. So, he distributed a lot of the goods to other travellers. Gurudev (Shriram) also met other Sadhus on the way. They all said that they had heard about divine yogis in these areas, but never met such a single person. Not only that but even ordinary yogis knowing yoga were hardly to be seen.

Even today this area is difficult for earning one's livelihood. The same was the condition on those days. Sometimes one came across some so-called sanyasis or sadhus (different types of monks) but none of them was divine. After talking to them for a while, they would open out and then make demands for certain things and if one could not provide these to them, they would curse the visitor. Gurudev was pained by these experiences.

On the way there were no rest houses. The resting places for travellers to spend the night were thatched awnings, mostly of the shopkeepers, with the shop in front and the shelter behind. Mountain-dwellers used to set up these shops. When a traveller purchased flour, pulses, rice etc.... from them, they would provide him with utensils, and bricks and coal for cooking. Utensils and bricks were given free of charge to the travellers.

When these were returned to the shopkeeper, he took them back on trust, and never bothered to count them. The pleased traveller would become friendly by the service given to him and warmly give him bidis, matchboxes, jaggery etc.... The honest shopkeepers used to keep those for other travellers. They used to provide bedding and blankets also for the travellers.

When Gurudev (Shriram) was directed by Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand to come to him in the Himalayas, winter had started. Not only the monks but also the householders living in hamlets at these heights used to come down to the plains because of the unbearable cold. The towns used to be more or less deserted and became ghost-towns. If by chance one found a light in a home, it was found that some old man was living there and was actually in need of some help.

One also encountered various reptiles like snakes and pythons, big lizards and animals like leopards, tigers, and bears. Over the years they have been destroyed by hunters. Also, the jungles accommodating them have vanished. Elephants were also found. Gurudev (Shriramji) used to tell us that everyday at least 15to20 times he would come across them. Initially he used to be afraid. but gradually became used to them and the fear vanished.

Guru Sarveshwaranandji had asked him to come to Nandanvan. This place is beyond Gangotri and then onwards to the very difficult path to Gomukh or the river-head of Ganga Gomukh is situated at a very great height. Beyond Gomukh is Tapovan. In this area there is difficulty at every step. There are so many ravines that if one slips down, there is no one to help. There is no sign of any human

being. Gurudev had kept a stick with him for probing to make sure that when he to took the next step, it would be on solid ground only and not a brittle ice.

Very very slowly, Gurudev crossed the Tapovan area. Then he came across a range of high mountains. He had to cross these mountains also. The surprising part of this journey was that he had no maps or notes to guide him, but he did not feel that he would be lost. Some instinct was guiding him on as if he had seen this path earlier. The divine power, i.e. Guru Sarveshwaranand, who had directed him through inspiration, was, as if holding his hand and directing him.

The mountain range was also crossed. Upto Gomukh sometimes some sadhu could be seen occasionally. One of them was Mahatma Raghunathdas. He had given up grains and cereals. He used to survive on the leaves of plants cooked with potatoes, for the past several years. He never asked anything from anyone. He gave practical tips to Shriram for avoiding the leaves of plants (which may appear good for food, but were poisonous) and in drinking the water from brooks.

Another saint he met was Swami Tatvabodhanand. Even in winter season he used to live in the open. He had prepared a hut, but rarely used it. If sometimes some pilgrim came, he would allow him to stay if he thought it fit to allow him. In this area beyond Tapovan only shepherds came with their flock after the rains because of some nutritious plants for their sheep and goats. But after the plants were eaten up, the shepherds too went down to the plains.

When Gurudev crossed this area, he felt a strong smell, but it was very much appealing. He felt a wheeling sensation in his head, and felt a sense of intoxication. This remained for some time and then he became used to it. On searching he found that the smell came from bushes which were all round. After going further Gurudev found a cave and took shelter in it. He remained awake practically throughout the night.

He looked at the mountains in the distance and it looked like a Shiv Ling (Symbol of Lord Shiva) and Jaldhara (water pouring on in tribute). On observing properly in the morning sunlight, he found that it was the natural shape of the mountain. The sadhus of this area have named it as Shiv Ling Shikhar (mountain top). A rivulet comes out as a river and the sadhus call it as swarg-ganga (ganga flowing from heaven).

As he started coming near Ganga glaciers and Gauri Sarovar, Gurudev felt familiar with the whole area, as if the memory of past births was tinkling in his mind.

Beyond Ganga Glacier he came to Kirti Glacier and then Man Sarovar (this is different from the Man Sarovar lake in Tibet.)

Gurudev did not know how long he walked and when he entered the Nandanvan area. What he saw after passing the Mansarovar was truly incredible. Just one step earlier there was not even a single indication of what he was to witness. He could see yagnas(oblations) being performed and fire in the yagna-kund. From these yagnas, fragrance and smoke were emanating.

Before Shriram collected his senses and understand the scene before him. He made human form manifested in front of him. Shriram recognized him as Guru Sarveshwaranand who had appeared suddenly 18 months earlier in his prayer-room at Aanwalkheda. Shriram's heart burst with joy. He immediately prostrated before Guru Sarveshwaranandji.

The Divine Guru or Dada Guru or Sarveshwaranandji smiled benignly. Then he turned and started walking and Shriram followed him silently. Describing his experiences at that time, says that he was actually walking more than one foot above the ground. Both went into a cave and halted. In between there was brief talk between them. Dada Guru asked Gurudev to rest for some time. Gurudev slept there. When he woke up, his body and mind felt fresh and energetic. Although he could not find the Divine Guru over there, a fire was burning nearby.

After getting up, Gurudev went outside, bathed in a brook and finished the daily prayers. Gurudev used to tell us that for the first time he saw a flower called Brahmakamal, (Divine lotus) over there. This is such a flower that its smell puts a person to sleep. Perhaps it was this smell which had put Gurudev into deep sleep and imbued with a feeling of freshness in the morning. Gurudev invariably used to compare a fully developed person to Brahmakamal.

Gurudev came across a root called Devkand (Divine root) which can be used for eating. It has a good taste and a fully developed Devkand is enough to satisfy one's hunger for weeks. After becoming familiar with these roots, Gurudev spent the whole day in seeing the beauty of the Nandanvan area. In the evening, he received a message to go to the same cave where he had spent the night. Around 3 a.m. the Divine Guru manifested before him and asked him to follow. On coming out he found that here was full moon in the sky and the snow on the Himalayan peaks and the plains was shining like silver.

Dada Guru was walking ahead. There was halo all around him. Gurudev was also enveloped in the same and then Gurudev never experienced the excruciating

cold in which human beings limbs will become frozen. Gurudev walked with the same ease with which he would walk in Agra or Mathura. On the way he saw various divine Yogi's and Dada Guru told him that all these yogis have cast off their mortal frames and are here in ethereal form.

Some of these divine souls or rishis were from the time of Mahabharat war and even earlier i.e. acons ago. These saints were all sitting with their eyes closed and in deep meditation. But no sooner would Dada Guru come near them, each one would open his eyes, reciprocate their greetings, and once again immerse themselves in meditations. No other words were exchanged. The names of some of the rishis are Garg muni, Dhoumya rishi, Govindpad, Saint Pundalik, Baba Narharidas, Jivanand Sidheshwar Giri, Pavhari and Swami Krishnanand.

Some more saints were there who were performing penance since 2000 to 6000 years. They are free souls but they are performing penance for the mortal world's human beings snared in the trappings of the weakness and shortcomings which human beings are prone to on this earth. God, the Supreme Power himself has appointed them here. Garg muni and Dhoumya rishi are here from the time of Upanishads. (ancient scriptures), the oldest scriptures on this earth, i.e. practically immediately after the manifestation of the Lord's creation.

Jivanand is from the time of Gautam Buddha. Govindpad is said to be one of the Gurus of Aadi Shankaracharya, one of the most venerable ones in the Hindu pantheon. The time-span of Swami Krishnanand is not known but Pandit Madan Mahon Malaviya had invited him at the time of the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwavidyalaya (Banaras University) and he had come in ethe- real form and in his presence the yagna was performed at the inauguration of the university. If one were to give details about each of these rishi's life and work it will take one big volume to contain them.

The body in ethereal form is very very capable but has also some limitations. The divine soul in such a form can cause inner inspiration, can even stimulate others. But if they have to make contact with people or have to get projects started, they have to have the medium of the earthly body-form. That is why, these divine 'powers' select some human beings on this earth as their medium. That is why Dada Guru was showing these powerful divine souls to Pandit Shriram. Then Guru Sarveshwaranandji took Shriramji to a cave where he was to stay, and vanished.

Next day when he awoke in the morning and looked out, he saw the wonderful effect of the sunrise. There was white light everywhere and from its reflections at certain points, it looked as if the light was dancing. Shriram was spellbound and the moment he recovered, he saw before him Dada Guru, this time not in ethereal body but in the body of human-being from this earth in flesh and bones. He came nearer and kept his hand on Shriram's head and immediately silent 'conversation' and instructions followed.

First came the memories of Shriram's, past births, then repetition of instructions of recitation of Gayatri mantra at the rate of 24 lakhs per year for 24 years, and simultaneously to take part in the freedom-struggle, then withdrawal from the freedom-struggle for some time and then to start discourses and creation of spiritual literature. Once the mahapurushcharan (the 24year-recitation) was over, a yagna to be performed with 1000 Gayatri Kunds (pits) for 24 lakhs oblations in fire. On this occasion the formation of an organisation and announcement of its aims and objectives.

The organisations headquarters to be in Mathura City, and 24 lakh oblations-yagna also to be at Mathura. Once the organisation takes root, to revive the ancient tradition of pure culture based on a religious way of life and for this a centre to be established at Haridwar on a site where the Ganga branches into seven tributaries. A number of these instructions were repetitions of instructions given 18 months ago so Shriram was wondering about the purpose for which he was called by Dada Guru. Some other thoughts were also rising in his mind such as the achievement of divine powers(siddhis) at the darshan (mere sight) of these powerful divine souls.

Immediately Guru Sarveshwaranand conveyd a "silent message" that the darshan and the protection from Him (Dada Guru) were enough, there was no necessity of running after such achievement of power. Then it came in a flash to Shriram's mind that the purpose of calling him there was to make him a member of the elite group of the divine ethereal souls and to protect him from all temptations that is why he was told that "there was no necessity of running after such powers", because when one runs after temptations, the main objective, the main goal is forgotten, and it may lead to one's downfall.

The main achievements i.e. to be a member of the elite group and also to be protected from all temptations are the most outstanding achievements. Then Dada Guru's hands were raised in blessing and this signalled that Shriram had now to return to Aawanlkheda. He was also told to come to Dada Guru's place

in future and was told that he would be informed at the appropriate time and the necessary arrangements will be made. He was clearly asked not to come on his own, nor show any desire for the same.

Then Shriram was asked to leave and Dada Guru vanished and nearby another saint was standing. He signalled Gurudev to go with him and within a few hours they were at Gomukh, the guiding-saint returned from here and Shriram returned alone, but this time the obstacles in the path were few and the journey was more or less easy. There was also great joy in the heart. When Shriram returned everyone was amazed at the improvement in his health.

The face was tinged with red, the body had become stronger and the skin was shining, the speech was mature and influenced others, there was a glow in the personality and polite- ness, yet firmness - had developed to such an extent as if Shriram had been given a new body. He was around seventeen years only and yet the youthful activeness had been replaced by the serious- ness and the quiet pervading joy of the rishis.

On returning home he rearranged his prayer-room. He started getting up easily around 2 am for prayers upto morning. Now he did not have to worry about getting up on time. He automatically awoke at the right time and for the next 2-3 years the recitations continued unabated. He was allowed relaxation in this routine in 1928 when he was involved in the freedom movement.

He was also told by Dada Guru that the fault for this slackness would be corrected by Dada Guru himself for nine years upto 1937, this kind of relaxation was resorted to. But after his first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, Gurudev Shriram once again became very punctual in the recitation programme which would be for 6 hours in the morning, then looking after the cows and then Swadhyaya (study).

Now Gurudev's journeys outside the village became a little less of course, he did not withdraw fully from the freedom movement. He still took part in the programmes of the Congress but was not actively involved. When someone asked him the reason, he replied that now the movement has spread and has become a people's movement and no longer in its infancy.

When Gurudev was busy in his Mahapurashcharan of 24 lakh recitations each year for 24 years, some unusual events started taking place which were nothing short of miracles. In 1942, Gurudev had come with his family to Mathura. 1942 was the year of the "Quit India" movement. This slogan was given by Gandhiji to

people to ask the British to quit India. The Government had started arrests of all activists for crushing this movement and every activist considered dangerous was on the "hit-list" of persons to be arrested.

Gurudev Shriram's name was also in the list because of his past record, although he was no longer active. It was decided to arrest him at 3 o'clock before dawn. When the officer knocked on the door, it opened and there stood a divine personality. He was dressed only in a saffron-coloured lion-cloth. His height was at least 2 feet more than that of the officer. The officer was awed and took a few steps back. The divine form vanished and the police officer rushed inside. Gurudev Shriram was found sitting in his prayers in front of a lighted lamp.

Once again, the divine form stood in the doorway in front of the officer. He did not have the courage to go forward and returned to the police-station. He decided that he will go during day-time to arrest Gurudev Shriram. Once it was day-light, the officer came to Gurudev's home. Gurudev was busy writing and behind was the picture of his Dada Guru. The police officer was shocked to see the picture, forgot the purpose for which he had come and suddenly asked, "Whose picture is this?" Gurudev replied, "He is my Guru and lives in the Himalayas".

The expression on the face of the officer was worth seeing. With great difficulty he was able to say, "But I saw him in the morning not once but twice." Then he told him the whole incident. Gurudev said, "Of course you must have seen him. He is also my protector. He must have come here on finding that you are here. He is more concerned that I should finish my prayers without interruption." After this explanation, the officer was so much impressed that he never again turned his face at Gurudev's home and whenever he received any instruction to arrest Gurudev, he would return it with the remark that the wanted person was not found or that he does not stay here and he is trying to trace him.

One more incident happened in 1942. Gurudev used to provide shelter to freedom-fighters trying to hide from the police. He would not go into details about the person. Once two thieves came masquerading as freedom-fighters. They were taken into the house. On finding an opportunity they went into the prayer-room. The doors were open. They had just turned in when they heard some coughing. When they looked up, they found a sadhu standing before them. He had thick black hair piled high, and fair appearance, strong body and a stick in his hand. The thieves immediately started running away.

Gurudev had just come out after his bath and on seeing them he shouted after them, "Where are you going? What is the matter? Go away in the morning." But because they were thieves, they just did not stop. They could not understand what was happening. One of the thieves stumbled and fell down but his companion did not help him and ran away. Gurudev Shriram went near the thief and asked him if he was injured. There was an injury and blood was flowing from a toe. Gurudev dressed the toe and then asked him the reason for running away. The thief gave the whole story, a clear indication of the protective umbrella of the Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji.

THE START OF THE MESSAGE THROUGH "AKHAND JYOTI" (1937-1941)

After the newspaper "Sainik", he started preparations for his own magazine. For this purpose, he started collecting the necessary material by reading for two years from all the libraries in Agra and collected the necessary matter.

For willing readers who will subscribe to his magazine, he approached friends. Most of them laughed at his idea of starting own magazine. They were of the opinion that such a task required large sum of money, experience, proper staff, etc...

They especially mentioned money because they knew that Gurudev will not take even a paisa from his family. When this was the case, how would Gurudev arrange the necessary capital. Gurudev used to give only one reply, "you need not worry about that". Everything will be arranged. Just tell me whether you will read my magazine or not. Most people refused to subscribe to his magazine. But Gurudev was not daunted and managed to get 500 subscriptions, but less than half of them paid the necessary subscription amount.

The said that they will pay when the magazine was printed. Gurudev named his magazine "Akhand Jyoti". There were two reasons for choosing this name, - one was the lamp kept burning continuously. This lamp was given by Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand. The second reason was that the name would symbolise God as light. His benevolence is available for sustaining life on this earth through light and energy from sun, and God's spiritual light should be available continuously for enlightening men's minds by knowledge.

Gurudev wrote articles for the magazine and also wrote poems. He also followed up for registering the name with the Government, meeting the postal authorities for postal licence, completing related Governmental procedures, administrative fol- low-up with the subscribers, arranging for paper and printing and other minute details. He created the necessary capital by selling personal ornaments and though some loans.

The first issue of Akhand Jyoti was published in January 1940 or Vasant Panchami day without any inaugural fanfare. The first copy of the magazine was kept in his prayer room at the hands of an eight-year-old girl called Gouri. The child was also directed by Gurudev in doing the ritual pooja by first drawing the swastik symbol in vermillion on the cover. Then rice grains were sprinkled on the cover. Then ritual pooja was performed for Devi Aadyashakti (The fountainhead of the internal energy-source symbolised as a woman).

The interesting part of this story is that the girl who performed this ritual was never seen again. The child-girl was found playing near Gurudev's home on the eve of Vasant Panchami day. Gurudev was inspired by some unknown force to have the pooja done by this child and asked her name and address and asked her to come for pooja the next day, and she came by 6 a.m. the next day, but after the pooja she was not seen again.

Only the first issue was delayed because the registration-papers for the name were not received on time, From the second issue onwards till now (1940 till now) the magazine has always come out on time, and this has been the case even when Gurudev was on tour in India or away in Himalayas when called by Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand.

Gurudev did not consider his subscribers as mere readers i.e. like most readers of other magazines who read for entertainment or passing time or to go to sleep. He considered his readers as members of a family, the Gayatri-family and all of a sudden it so happened that readers started coming to his home in a steady stream for consulting about their problems.

Once again Gurudev received the message from his Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji to meet him in the Himalayas. This was in 1940 when the 5th issue of Akhand Jyoti was about to be published. He came out from the prayer room, gave some instructions to Mataji (his wife) and started packing with energy and left. This time he was going to Himalayas after 14 years and the journey was not difficult.

A road was being prepared beyond Uttarkashi and various facilities were gradually available. This was spring season, soon it would be summer, so Gurudev did not take winter clothing and also took less luggage with him. Earlier, hardly a person was seen beyond Uttarkashi, but now people could be seen coming and going. And, the most important part was that Gurudev was now familiar with the road.

The journey upto Gangotri was without any problem or difficulty. From there upto Gomukh the road is of a constantly changing nature. Ice melts and starts flowing here and there. landslides are common. They block the paths of brooks and streams thus changing their directions.

When Gurudev got ready to proceed onwards from Gomukh, he saw an ethereal sadhu standing before him. This body was completely transparent and on observing him, Gurudev realised that he was the same ethereal being who had

guided him to and for during his previous sojourn 14 years back. Gurudev followed him on the path to Nandanvan, where Guru Sarveshwaranand received him. He placed his right hand in blessing on his head. Sarveshwaranandji again took Gurudev Shriram to the various ancient divine sages.

The difference was that this time they had changed their forms in the forms of figures in divine light and not in ethereal body-form. Thus, their eyes, ears, nose etc. were seen as if they were full of light. Gurudev used to tell us that because they are as collections of light, they do not require any place to stay but when they want to meet someone, they assume ethereal bodies.

Human bodies are made of five elements, viz, earth, water, air, space and fire. The divine sages mentioned above, use only the micro-form of these elements and these are known as “tanmatra” (tan = body, matra = smallest necessary measure). Depending on the level of the person they wish to meet, they use the five or less than five elements in the smallest necessary measure. If the person they wish to meet is of the highest level, they just use the element of fire in the smallest measure and hence the "body" or the form of that soul looks full of light.

The sages in front of Gurudev had manifested before him this time by using the "fire" element. This time they talked with Gurudev. The essence of their message was that the traditions established and propagated by them so assiduously for the upliftment of human souls had crumbled over the passage of time and were now in ruins

One of the sages gestured to Gurudev to look in a certain direction and the moment Gurudev turned his gaze and immediately saw the area from Gangotri to Haridwar - spread over a few hundred miles - very clearly as if one is watching the street below from one's own window. And then Gurudev watched as the time rolled back as if a movie-film started. He saw that this area of several hundred miles was once a very holy place where sages were performing penance only. From place to place, hermitages were seen with Gurukuls (residential schools for children) and Gods staying here.

By the term "Gods" we do not mean the one and only supreme, but souls who have been elevated to a very special status by the blessing of the supreme because of their penance, (good deeds etc.). When the above scenes ended, the divine sages lamented the crumbling of these traditions and their values. This was a definite indication that the sages wanted to revive these traditions and

values. Guru Sarveshwaranand promised them that his disciple Shriram will carry out this work of re-establishment of these traditions... Gurudev bowed his head down in acceptance of the above promise.

On the return journey Sarveshwaranandji told Shriram that more than half of his Mahapurashcharan of 5,76,00,000 Gayatri Mantra was now over and he should recite the remaining portion at Mathura because there he will have to establish a centre for the teaching of Gayatri mantra and its powers along with a cultural centre, and he has to start creating the background from now. Then the divine Guru arranges for Shriram to return and once again the divine soul with the transparent body took him back. This same soul has been seen working for Gurudev Shriram as his assistant and he has been named as Veerbhadra by him.

Gurudev returned to Agra and found that all the work for Akhand Jyoti is going on smoothly and the printed issue was ready for despatch. As such there was absolutely no staff. Mataji (Gurudev's wife) informed him that during his absence two young men used to come and do all the work. They had told her that they were sent to her by Gurudev Shriram. They have even wrapped each issue in addressed-wrapper and fixed the necessary postal- stamp. Gurudev looked at the manuscripts and found that they were all in his own handwriting. After looking at it he did not make any comment and absorbed himself in the work.

Since Gurudev was directed to shift to Mathura, he had to be ready to wind up the publication of Akhand Jyoti from Agra. Gurudev had gone earlier only 3 to 4 times to Mathura and did not know anyone but was not afraid. He had absolute faith in the Divine Dada Guru and in a short time was able to get a small house on rent. This house had 3 rooms. One room was kept for Akhand Jyoti's work and the remaining rooms for use as living quarters, but Gurudev was asked to shift because the landlord did not like so many visitors coming to that area.

Once again Gurudev started house-hunting and after a lot of searching, found a big house in the Ghia Mandi area. The landlady was an elderly widow. She demanded a rent of Rs. 15 per month. Although he found the rent high, Gurudev decided to inspect the house. The building was very old and was not cleaned and painted for a long time. The doors were creaky and showed proof of neglect. It was a 3-storeyed building with 15 rooms. He immediately paid the advance for the rent and the landlady was very happy.

When Gurudev Shriram was shifting his household to the new building, he observed that the neighbours were gossiping in hushed tones. Gurudev ignored

it all and shifted all belongings to this new home. After some minutes one lady and her husband came for a social visit and quickly became friends with Mataji (Gurudev's wife). The husband also introduced himself and it was evident that he had come with good intentions and wished well to Gurudev and Mataji.

He informed Gurudev that the house is hunted and the neighbours are harassed daily because of the uproar and mischief of the ghosts. That is the reason that the house is available because the earlier tenants could hardly stay for 3 to 4 days and then vacated out of fear. So, the good neighbour advised them to be cautiously on guard.

Now there was a dilemma, because Gurudev had completed shifting to this new house. The neighbour advised that still there was a way out, that is, that Gurudev and Mataji should arrange to spend the night somewhere else and came back in the morning and vacate during day time. Upon hearing the advice of the neighbour, Gurudev remarked, "Now that we have came, here already, the ghosts will stay and so shall we". The good neighbour and his wife were crestfallen and left with sad faces. After that some more neighbours came, repeated the same story and advised that at least for the safety of the children, they should leave. But Gurudev was firm and made the same remark to everyone.

The story about the haunted house was true. Gurudev was knowing about it much before he came. But he had no quarrel with the ghosts. He thought that since he had nothing against the ghosts, they too will not have any complaint against him. We will not tell them anything, will not be afraid, because if we do not trouble them, why should they trouble? After nightfall, there was the tumult of the ghosts crying, quarrelling and the sounds of beating with sticks. After that there was the sound of throwing around of furniture and kitchenware. Gurudev thought of reasoning with ghosts. He lighted a lantern and went up. The moment the ghosts saw the lantern's light, they ran away. This went on for one week and a half.

One night Gurudev took his cot to the terrace but went there at one o'clock at night. With the lantern in his hand, he approached the ghosts, but they started running away. Immediately Gurudev called them. This was a completely new experience for the ghosts and they suddenly froze in their tracks. Gurudev told them, "You have been staying here for a long time.

Stay by all means and be comfortable. But let us stay also. Let us make an arrangement. We will not come to the seven rooms on the top floor. In the lower eight rooms we will stay and you should not disturb us. Let us live together peacefully in this way. None of the ghosts replied, but after that night not a sound was heard again and since Gurudev continued staying there, the neighbours were very much surprised.

The February-issue of 1941 was printed from Mathura and the date of despatch, by a coincidence was the day of Vasant Panchami.

TAPOBHOOMI – CONSECRATION (1941 To 1958)

One of the directives given by Divine Guru Sarveshwaranandji to Gurudev Shriram was to establish the Gayatri Tapobhoomi at Mathura. Gurudev laid the foundation for Gayatri Tapobhoomi in 1958. We have seen earlier that Gurudev came to Mathura and started staying in the ghost-ridden house from 1941. The period till 1958 i.e. 17 long years went in preparing the background for the creation of the Tapobhoomi. Tapobhoomi means a place where tapashcharya, that is penance is performed for spiritual upliftment.

The 1940s was a period of upheaval all over the world. The world war which started in 1938, lasted till 1945 and over crore men women and children were killed. Many European countries were ruined, there was widespread misery in the form of war- widows, orphans, maimed human beings and food-shortages. Another development was the development of the atom-bomb and its use on Japan's cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many countries of Asia started becoming free from their imperialistic rulers and they started undergoing a different kind of suffering.

The world-war had created severe shortage of paper but Gurudev was able to maintain the regularity of Akhand Jyoti's publication despite the hurdle. But what is more important is that during all these years Gurudev laid the foundation of his amazing work of putting on paper his invaluable messages for social and spiritual upliftment, not only of India, but the whole world.

Gurudev started working on every conceivable subject, but chiefly on character-building, how to develop spirituality and progress on the spiritual path, health and hygiene, the solution to social maladies, tackling national problems, removal of superstitions etc... In those days Gurudev coined a new phrase called vaigyanik adhyatmavad or scientific spiritualism and even wrote a book with the same title in 1946. The essence of its message was to shed those beliefs which cannot be supported or pass the test of logic, proof, truth or reality.

Gurudev also published a voluminous book titled Gayatri Mahavigyan (The great science of of Gayatri mantra) and after this publication his desire to establish a dynamic centre for Gayatri- worship became more powerful. For this the divine sages, wanted the involvement of a large number of people because spiritual message had to reach the masses for the revival of the real spiritual traditions of the ancient ages when truth ruled and people lived disciplined, yet peaceful lives free from temptations and materialism.

As a first step to get a large number of people involved, Gurudev gave a call to the youth to come forward and announced that he wanted 1000 dedicated young workers with one condition that each of them must write the Gayatri Mantra 2400 times neatly in a book and send to him at Mathura.

Thus, the total number of the handwritten mantras would be 24,00,000 and these were to be sent by June 1957. A programme spread over 12 months upto June 1958 was announced. In this programme people all over India would take vows and make a combined total recitation of 125,00,00,000, and also 125,000 combined fasts (i.e. to avoid food totally on the day of fast and say prayers and observe other rules) and in June 1958 one yagna to be performed in which 125,00,000 oblations will be offered in a holy fire.

Money for buying the required land was arranged from selling Gurudev's wife's ornaments and from donations from a few well-wishers.

Gurudev's Mahapurashcharan of 24 lakh Gayatri Mantras to be recited 24 times was completed in 1951. The consecration ceremony was performed in presence of 125 dedicated devotees on Gayatri-Jayanti-day in 1954. (Vikram Samrat 2010) For the consecration ceremony water from 2400 holy centres was collected and soil from 51 Shaktipiths (Gayatri-recitation and propagation centres) was collected. A 24-day ritual of recitations for sanctifying the above soil was carried out.

Consecration Ceremony

In front of the Gayatri temple Gurudev sat on a flat stool for 24 days. Gurudev fasted on these 24 days and would take water only if necessary. When he came before dawn on the full-moon day of the Vaishakh month in the area, the 125 dedicated devotees were ready to perform non-stop Gayatri recitations, in relays. After the prayers and Arati (ritual recitation with lighted lamp in front of an image), Gurudev folded his hands in prayer.

He and his wife (whom we shall now call Mataji) performed the parikrama (ritual circumambulation or going round the temple for a certain number of times). After the parikrama Gurudev came near the flat stool and stood for a few seconds, bowed to the 125 persons with folded hands, looked at the picture of Gayatri Mata and read out his resolve of fasting for 24 days, sat on the stool and stood up only after 24 days. He also observed silence during all the 24 days.

During those 24 days the 125 dedicated devotees had some characteristic experiences. During all those days in the entire area they experienced a divine atmosphere. Although they were only 125 in number, they always felt that they were not alone but many others were present.

When they looked around, they were not able to see any such extra persons, but the feeling persisted that someone is nearby. Sometimes they would hear the sound of breathing, persons walking around and murmuring sounds of mantra-recitations. Later on, on some occasions Gurudev used to mention that many divine souls from the Himalayas and the Vindhyachal mountains had came to the place to specially charge the atmosphere by joining in the recitations.

A certain type of transformation came in Gurudev's personality. He had known about it in advance but wanted to keep it a secret. Therefore, he had instructed in advance that nobody should touch his feet. During those 24 days, other devotees also were coming to the centre as usual, and although told not to touch Gurudev's feet some of them ignored the same.

One of these was Pandit Deenanath. The moment he touched Gurudev's feet; he was taken aback. He felt he had kept his hand on burning coal. He told Gurudev, “You are having fever". Gurudev gestured to him to keep quiet, but Deenanath ran to Mataji and expressed his fear that Gurudev was running high temperature. Mataji explained that because of the special penance, special energy is permeating in him and hence he has given the above instruction in advance.

Another devotee called Ranchhodbhai had come from Gujarat. He touched Gurudev's feet out of curiosity. Hardly did he touch the feet than he felt an electric shock, and automatically withdrew his hand. Several other devotees also felt such a shock. After this, a board with instruction written on it was placed near Gurudev prohibiting any visitor from touching Gurudev's feet.

Three days after Gurudev sat on the stool. the devotees sitting for relay-recitations saw that a golden-halo was shining around Gurudev. One devotee also felt that a flame of fire was surrounding Gurudev. Out of fear for Gurudev's safety, he shouted in anxiety. Others looked at him and he pointed at Gurudev. Other devotees looked these but did not say anything.

Afterwards visitors who had come there could see a halo around Gurudev. This halo used to be intense during pre-drawn and during the evening-prayers. This halo was seen for two days and became a subject of talk among visitors. On the

third day Mataji put a white cloth-covering on Gurudev and one blanket over it although it was summer-time.

After a week, Gurudev stopped looking at any visitor. When visitor had come earlier, for Gurudev's darshan (to pay respects), Gurudev would look at the visitor and raise his hand in the gesture of blessing. When he stopped looking at the visitors, he also covered his eyes with goggles. We shall give the reason for this by illustration when Govinddas from Mouranipur stood before Gurudev in obeisance and Gurudev looked at him, at first, he felt goose-pimples and then a tremor passed through him.

He had never felt this during earlier darshan or later on. He was about to cry out because of the above experience but composed himself. Later on, Gurudev explained that when one undertakes certain special types of penances, a lot of energy collects during the process and hence the above experiences were felt by the visitors.

During the above 24 days the other recitations which were also performed were 1) recitation of the yajurved 2) Gita 3) Rudra- ashtadhyayi 4) Gayatri sahastranam 5) Gayatrikavach 6) Durga saptashati and 7) Mahamrutyanjaya. During these days many visitors felt an indescribable change within themselves because of the vibrations of the mantras in the atmosphere.

The fire manifests

The consecration-ceremony was to be on the 24th day of fasting, that is on the 10th day in the Jyeshtha month, the 8th month of the Hindu calendar. Three specially chosen learned saints were going to perform this ceremony. They entered the yagna-shala (the room for the yagna), recited the necessary mantras and started the process of creating the fire by Arani-Manthan (i.e. by friction of the wood of the Arani tree and not by lighting with matchstick etc.). The purohits (the three priests) performing the ceremony started the process of friction of the Arani-wood along with the proper chants of mantras, but there was no fire.

They repeated the process three more times, yet there was no success. Gurudev was watching this all the while. Now he called one devotee and told him to bring the piece of Arani-wood to him. Gurudev held the wood in his hands and told the priests to chant the Samgan, (mantras from the Samved) closed his eyes and held the piece in his hands for some moments. Then he gave the "charged" Arani-wood to the same devotee and told him to take it to the priests. Similarly, Gurudev also took a bunch of coconut-fibres in his hands and "charged" it

similarly and sent it to the priests. The coconut-fibres had immediately become fragrant.

When the devotee took that Arani-wood to the Yagna-room, he observed that the wood was already burning. Actually, Gurudev had charged the wood with fire from Dada Guru's Yagna-kund (yagna-pit) where a Yagna-pyre is continuously burning for over 700 years.

After breaking his 24-day fast with orange juice, Gurudev told the devotees present that this place where he along with them made the special prayers is divinely charged since thousands of years. On this place Durvasa rishi performed prolonged penance during Shri Krishna's times. After Durvasa rishi, 24 more saints worshipped on this very place and achieved superhuman powers.

And now we will perform even bigger programmes of worship chiefly the following three: 1) Gayatri-yagna in 108 pits 2) One Naramedh-yagna 3) Sahastrakundiya Gayatri-yagna. Gurudev then proclaimed, "Upto now I have not initiated anyone as my disciple. I have been advising people to lead truthful, just and moral lives. But now I have accumulated the strength to be capable of initiating others. So, from to-morrow morning I shall start initiating people into the Gayatri mantra.

After the consecration ceremony, Gurudev and devotees performed the Jagran (remaining awake throughout the night with prayers and devotional songs) as required.

After the above historic announcement, Gurudev once again abstained from food or water. In the morning, he came to the Yagna-room and initiated the willing devotees into the Gayatri- mantra. After the initiation it is a custom to offer something to the Guru in devotion. Different people wanted to offer different things to Gurudev. He refused all that and said, “Just give me the following Dakshina(offering). Give up one bad habit and replace it with one good habit. If the habit involves expense like taking tea or liquor etc., the money saved after discarding the habit should be spent for some good cause".

After the Gayatri-mantra-initiation he gave them a code of conduct, that is, they must recite Gayatri mantra in the morning and evening, the number to be as per the 108 beads of the rosary, therefore one rosary in the morning and one in the evening. They must fast either on Thursday or Sunday. They should contact neighbours and friends and make them devotees of the Gayatri- mantra. When their number comes to five or more, they should perform together a Gayatri-

yagna once a week and tell each other their experiences of the beneficial changes that this mantra has brought in their lives.

The above was just a minute beginning of the Gayatri- movement and the beginning of the movement for the transformation of the era. This was the acorn which flowered forth into a vast banyan-tree.

As per the historic announcement made on the consecration- day, the various programmes started. For five years yagnas and other projects were undertaken. In 1954-April, a 15-months long yagna was started. In 1955 on the auspicious Vasant Panchami day, a Naramedh yagna was announced in which men would take a vow to renounce their bad habits and selfishness for the good of the society.

In 1956 September Mahamrutyunjay yagna, Vishnu yagna, Shatachandi yagna, Navagraha yagna and recitations of the four Vedas (Rugved, Yajurved, Samved and Atharvaved) were per- formed. The number of disciples had increased to over five thousand. They wanted to take part in the rituals in September 1956. Gurudev advised them not to come to Mathura and instead concentrate on expanding the Gayatri-mission in their areas. Gurudev's disciples followed this instruction and when lay- people came to take part in these yagnas, the disciples would encourage then to start Gayatri-recitations at their homes and also to start systematically writing the mantra regularly in a special notebook.

The 108-Kundiya mahayagna was inaugurated by parliament- speaker Anantashayanam Aiyangar. This was the first programme in Tapobhoomi on a vast scale with about 20,000 persons' participation for four days. At the end of the ceremony Gurudev announced that in the coming days 5-kundiya yagnas and 9-kundiya yagnas will be performed at 108 places. The formation of the Gayatri Parivar (the Gayatri Family) was announced in September 1956 and the Gayatri Family's All India convention was arranged in June 1957, at Gayatri Tapobhoomi.

The devotees were categorised into 3 types viz 1) devotees interested only in worship 2) devotees performing yagnas and also working for social reforms. They were termed as active workers and 3) those managing the branch in their areas. They were termed as mantri (secretary) or karyavahak (missionary), and were given the responsibility of keeping in touch and maintaining good relations with the workers, and carrying on the mission's work. All the branches would be under the control of Gurudev and Mataji.

In the first year of the establishment of the Gayatri mission, a Mahapurshcharan or recitation of 24 lakhmantras for remedying the misery of natural calamities and imbalance prevailing in the society.

Incidentally I mention here Gurudev's third journey to Dada Guru in 1951. Dada Guru once again took him to his council of divine powers and invited them for a mahayagna (great yagna) of 1000 kundis (yagna pits) in 1958. The announcement for this programme was made to the mission's members in 1957. Gradually Gayatri Tapobhoomi became popularly known as Gayatri Mandir (temple) among the surrounding population. Ghanshyamdas Birla becomes interested

In those days, the second biggest industrial group was the House of Birlas and Ghanshyamdas Birla was the patriarch of the group. He was not merely an industrialist but a deeply religious person. He was highly impressed with Gurudev's one-man effort and his achievements. Birla arranged a meeting with Gurudev and met him in Gayatri Tapobhoomi and they exchanged views on a number of subjects. Then Birlaji proposed to finance Gurudev for the temple coming up at the Gayatri Tapobhoomi. Gurudev promptly replied to him to have such a project elsewhere.

The reason he gave was that he was inspired by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's proposal to start a movement for fund-collection for congress by involving even the smallest man to contribute his mite-Gurudev told that thousands of people are giving small amounts like half to one rupee regularly for the construction and this also helps to unite them in a common cause. Ghanshyamdas Birla was highly impressed by this reasoning and said, "I too want to make a small contribution". Gurudev replied, “Of course, but that small contribution has to be similar to that of any other ordinary member only. And one more thing, you will have to take a vow to recite the Gayatri-mantra regularly". Birlaji promptly accepted both the conditions.

Now there was a proper atmosphere in the Tapobhoomi for the worshipper to come here for regular penance. Gurudev also started conducting seminars and workshops on the various aspects of Gayatri-worship such as advanced worship, worship for a special purpose, the health-giving and healing properties of the Gayatri mantra and so on. The number of participants was kept small to enable Gurudev to pay personal attention to every individual and the participants used to be taken to Gurudev's home at Ghia Mandi in Mathura for lunch and dinner. Not only that, but Mataji herself used to wash the dishes afterwards.

THE NEXT STEP (1958-1961)

After the Mahapurashcharan was over, a change occurred in Gurudev's routine. To his daily routine, starting from 3 a.m. in the morning he started "Saraswat sadhana" or creating literature based on the Vedas (Rugved Yajurved, Samved and Atharvaved) the most ancient Indian scriptures followed by Upanishads created by spiritually realised rishis or sages in ancient times. Because these rishis had achieved self-actualisation and had become one with the Supreme, the knowledge which flowed forth from them as Upanishads has been directly bestowed by the supreme.

Foreign invaders systematically destroyed most literature with their dogmatic and fundamentalist terrorism and carnage and only a few copies were preserved on bhojputra-leaves and laboriously copied by people wanting to preserve it. They had preserved this ancient heritage many a time at grave risk from the invaders during the Middle Ages. They even left their families and property etc at the mercy of the invaders during the middle-ages and helped to preserve this priceless literature.

The Savants, at Varanasi, Prayag, Avantika, Nasik, Puri, Kanchi, Rameshwar went to great pains to save the Vedas and other literature. The incident of Rameshwar Bhatt a great sage of Kashi is well-known. In the 16th century Mughal invaders terrorised Kashi and when they were trying to enter Bhatt's home, Bhatt was tying up the four Vedas which were written on dried tree-leaves. Before he could leave through an underground passage, the Mughal terrorists had entered from there and he was not able to save his wife and children. The rascals killed his wife and children before him, but he saved the priceless scriptures and escaped.

Gurudev often used to say that many such people have sacrificed their near and dear ones to save our priceless heritage and we have to be forever grateful to them. But the unfortunate part is that these people were forced to pass it down to certain people only, and now the time had came to pass it down to the people at large. This was also the directive of Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji to him. Unlike the Mughal fanatics, the English were sympathetic to our heritage and scholars like Max Mueller, Mac Donald, Paul Dyson, William Jones and others came to India as seekers and collected the ancient literature from many places in India. But still the literature was confined to Western Scholars only, because it was translated in their languages.

The Western scholars had relied on the critics prepared by Rishi Sayan because this was more easily available and easier to understand. But other sages such as Mahidhar, Uvvat, Kumaril, Shankar, Mahav and others had also prepared literature on the Vedas. Then in the 19th century, Maharshi Dayanand prepared the literature in a new style which could be easily understood. Afterwards Yogi Arvind, Kumar Swami and Pandit Satavlekarji prepared the same in their own style in the 20th century. Dada Guru Sarveshwaranandji had directed Gurudev to co-ordinate all this style and prepare all the literature in full.

Regarding the four Vedas, there was a difficulty. It was that the texts of Veda's were not found together. Different sections were scattered in different areas. The difficulty was enormous because the total richas or stanzas of the Vedas are 100,000 and to collect and collate them was stupendous task. So, Gurudev started on the tough journey to Varanasi, Prayag, Nasik, Pune, Dwarika, Avantika, Nadia etc. After collecting the vast literature, Gurudev then started arranging them in order. Through the efforts of Vithal Chaturvedi, Dwarkaprasad Bharadwaj, Bharatiya Yogi and others he was able to collect the six Darshan shastras, 18 puranas, 20 smritis, and 24 bhashyas (explanatory texts) on the Gita. But collecting the Upanishads was an altogether different proposition. There are over 140 Upanishads, out of which 108 are considered standard reference material. Out of these only 24 could be collected while the rest of the above literature was being collected from all over India.

Vithal Chaturvedi, Dwarkaprasad Bharadwaj Bharatiya Yogi and others were tired after the effort to collect the above vast literature and were not only disappointed but dejected that wherever Gurudev sent them for the Upanishads, there was no result. In fact, Vithal Chaturvedi had decided to "resign" from the work because he found the work too hard. Vithalji was staying in Mathura only. The day he decided that he will inform Gurudev about his proposed "resignation" on the next day, he was called to Gurudev's residence. He had came from there less than half-an-hour ago and he could not understand why he was called once again. The moment he reached there, Gurudev told him, "Your problem has been solved. Instead of 108, we have now got 146 Upanishads. Now do not give up" Vithalji could never understand how Gurudev had came to know that he wanted to "resign" because he had not told this to anyone.

The material of 146 Upanishads was handwritten and immediately Vithalji started wondering about the authenticity of the texts. Immediately Gurudev told

him, "Don't start doubting. They are thoroughly authentic and have come from a special place." Gurudev did not reveal the name of this special place. The hand-written material was on loose-papers tied in saffron cloth. The surprising part was that the handwriting on the papers was Gurudev's Vithalji was flabbergasted because if Gurudev was preparing them, why did he not inform him & others? And where did he find the time to go to different places an copy out the matter? So, when Vithalji asked him, "Where did you find them Guruji? If you had asked us, we would have copied them for you." Gurudev said only thus, “These are not copied down. They have been ordered from somewhere." Vithalji said, “But the handwriting is yours only" Gurudev then said cryptically, "Forget the handwriting. This will serve your purpose, isn't it?" Vithalji then realised that some unseen power was working for Gurudev and guiding them all, and they were only the media in the whole plan.

While the work for writing on the mountain of ancient scriptures was to start, Gurudev was "summoned" once again by his Divine Guru. So, the team assisting Gurudev doubted about starting and completing the work on time. Gurudev told him to leave all that to his Divine Guru.

While preparing for his journey to the remote Himalayas, Guruji started handing over the work of Akhand Jyoti magazine, the administration of the Gayatri-mission's branches, guidance to workers and Gayatri seminars-workshops to Mataji. He took all the original texts of the ancient scriptures along with him. On the way, from Haridwar Guruji sent a letter informing the mission that the matter for the magazine, manuscripts for other books and necessary directions will be given regularly, and he will continue writing during the journey. He also maintained a diary during the journey. This diary was later published under the title 'Soonsaan Ke Sahachar' (Companions in the Silent Region).

But what is really astounding is that Gurudev carried out the extremely difficult work of translation, collation and detailed explanations throughout, that is from Haridwar to Gangotri (an area of several hundred miles). Then the writing was suspended for about 10 days when he met the Divine Guru Sarveshwaranand and on the return journey, he started sending the magazine's matter once again from Gangotri.

In 1961* June on the Gayatri Jayanti day, the printed treatises on the four Vedas were released officially. The Upanishads and ancient scriptures were published later, especially the ancient scriptures known as Puranas. This is because during the fanatical attacks by the Mughals, many sly and selfish people had made their

own additions in the texts. Thus, it was an extremely difficult task to identify the false insertions, remove them and prepare pristine pure texts, but Gurudev was able to accomplish this because the hidden hand and power of the Dada Guru was working for him behind the scenes. Then came the six Darshan-shastras, the 20-smrutis and the 24 Gita-bhashyas. Suffice to say here that the publication of such a vast volume of literature took only 5 years. Not only is this a miracle but the entire ancient literature on religion and spiritual science explained in one style and written by only one person has not been produced anywhere in the world.

Sometimes Gurudev would tell us that during his four journeys, he was with the Divine Guru Sarveshwaranandji only for 9 days. These journeys lasted from one month to one year. But each time he was with his Guru hardly for 2 or 3 days. The rest of the time was used for performing various types of penances or spiritual endeavours to acquire spiritual energy or spiritual "powers".

During this 4th journey was to tell Gurudev to start the process of revival of the pure Indian traditions established by the sages (rishis). Among these, chieffy to start all over the country a series of Gayatri yagnas, a series of conventions under the programme of Yug Nirman (creation of a new era with a spiritual and moral base), to revive the 16 sacramental rites, eradication of the dowry system, starting mass-worship for creating an atmosphere suitable for creating a new spiritual-moral era, expansion of the Gayatri-mission and preparing dynamic volunteers capable of creating the new era. All this to be carried out within 10 years and along with that to create a second line of succession so that would become free to follow further instructions from the Divine Council through the Divine Dada Guru.

When Gurudev returned from the third journey to the Himalayas, he prepared the plan for the 'Vichar Kranti Abhiyan' (campaign to bring a change in pattern of thinking of the people). Three years earlier he had asked his devotees to prepare plans for starting five-Kundiya (5-pits) Yagnas, 1-Kundiya and 11-Kundiya yagnas and start branches and prepare a band of one thousand dedicated workers for changing the moral, intellectual and social fabric of the country. Gurudev also directed the delegates to take a vow to shed one bad and replace it with one good habit.

To being about the change in the society, Gurudev would prepare the necessary literature and he also promulgated 18 maxims which are re-iterated in every

programme of the mission. At the same time five other magazines were started. Each magazine deals with different subjects as follows:

Akhand Jyoti ..... Religion, Philosophy, methods of worship

Gayatri Parivar Patrika ..... in formation on activities of the mission

Yug Nirman Yojana ..... information on programmes and projects for moral intellectual and social upliftment

Yug Shakti ..... various aspects of Gayatri mantra

Mahila Jagruti ..... Creating awareness among women

Pragya Abhiyan..... Spreading of new ways of thinking to root out rigid orthodoxy.

THE YAGNA CONFERENCE CAMPAIGN (1961-1971)

After returning from the Himalayas, Gurudev started visiting the various branches in the regional programmes. Gurudev had to face opposition from different quarters in these programmes because of Gurudev's campaign to start new traditions in place of orthodox beliefs and dogmatic rituals. One of these was initiation of women into the Gayatri mantra. Half-backed priests with limited knowledge and vested interests started saying that Gurudev is not right in doing this, because women have no right to recite Gayatri mantra and perform the yagna.

Gurudev replied with proof that in Vedic scriptures rushikas (women sages) have been mentioned and they had achieved unity with supreme by their penances with mantra-recitations. If they did not have the right to recite Gayatri and perform Gayatri-yagna, how did God appear before such women sages as Gargi, Ghosha, Apala, Vishwavara and others? The established priesthood argued that women are debarred from reciting Gayatri because Gayatri mantra is written in the Vedas, the most holy Indian scriptures. Gurudev's reply was very convincing. He said, "If women are not given the right to recite Gayatri, then why do we envisage Gayatri in the form of a woman and as Matru-Satta (the mother with benevolent powers)

Kashi Vidwatparishad is considered to be the highest body of scholars in Sanskrit-language, and normally their judgement on controversial issues is considered final. They challenge Gurudev for shastrarth (public debate on religion supported by shastra i.e. religious scripture) Gurudev replied that the atmosphere is not right for it. This is because it has been observed that just to prove their point many a time some people adopt fanatic stances and resort to such tactics as purposeful misinterpretation or distortion of texts instead of making sincere efforts to find out the truth.

Krishnadatta Shastri who had acted as the messenger for Kashi Vidwatparishad asked, "Should we consider this reply as an acceptance of defeat? Should I inform the members as such or would you like to give a message?" Gurudev replied, "I am not interested in debate at all. When I do not agree with the proposal for a debate, the question of conquest or defeat does not arise at all. If you wish, you may take my proposal for an exchange of views and dialogue to the scholars. They should be first mentally prepared for it so that we can meet with open minds and whichever part of the discussion is supported by reason, should be acceptable. to either side."

Within two weeks of the above message, a programme for exchange of views was arranged. Gurudev went to Kashi, exchanged views quoting from religious books. He not only said that all, that is men and women have the right to Gayatri mantra, but to clarify his point supported it by an incident from the life of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a Sanskrit-scholar respected all over India. He was also the founder of Kashi (Banaras) University. One lady- student called Kumari Chandrakanta wanted to study the Vedas.

In her application-form she had mentioned her merits and capability. She was fully eligible without any doubt, but the orthodox persons at higher levels in the University obstructed her application saying that women are not entitled to study the Vedas. But Chandrakanta was a girl of mettle. She went to every official of the University but nobody had the strength to change or criticise the opinion of the orthodox elders. Ultimately Chandrakanta went to the great Madan Mohan Malaviya and complained to him about the ban on her admission.

Malaviyaji did not react immediately, but referred the matter to the highest council of the University. Chandrakanta pleaded her case with the council and supported her case with solid references to such an extent that the council found them flawless and finally the council accepted the right of women to study the Vedas.

Besides quoting the above incident, Gurudev provided other references too. He made his presentation with such politeness and grace that nobody's self-respect was hurt. Everyone became convinced that women are entitled to study the Vedas and recite the Gayatri mantra also. In the same conference the right of women to wear the yagnopavit (the sacred thread) was also discussed. It was finally decided that women have the right to wear the sacred thread and they have to change the thread after the menstrual period. And since this is an arrangement of nature for women, it has to be accepted as such and does not go against a woman's right for wearing the sacred thread.

Another area in which Gurudev found opposition was caste. Gurudev initiated people from all castes into Gayatri mantra. When Gurudev started Gayatri-yagna-campaign at Mathura and invited people of all castes, Pandits in some pilgrimage centres started giving various derogatory names to Gurudev and called him a member of the sweeper caste. he simply ignored such criticism. Gurudev always walked from his Ghiyamandi-home to Gayatri Tapobhoomi and on the way faced all kinds of ridicule from the people, ignored it with determination but never reacted.

Some of the followers of Gurudev once secretly decided to teach a lesson to these ridiculers. Somehow Gurudev came to know of this plan, called the followers and severely scolded them and ordered them to refrain from any such plan. Then he immediately became his normal self and explained to them that one does not become small when someone says that you are a low-caste person, because each caste has some virtues and if we think of these virtues, it will benefit us. Well, I call myself a dhobi and mehtar because as a dhobi or washerman, I try to wash myself along with others in the society and as a mehtar (sweeper, night-soil collector), I consider it my duty to cleanse myself and others in the society of the dirt in our minds. Since you are my followers, you should also consider likewise.

There is a popular but wrong belief that only a dwij (brahmin- caste) person has the right to recite Gayatri. Gurudev's belief in this regard is entirely in tune with the dictum laid down in the shastras (religious books). The famous dictum in Mahabharat says, 'Janmana jayate shudra: sanskarat dwijochchayate' and is repeated in many other smrutis (ancient religious books). It means that everyone is a shudra (low-caste) by birth but becomes a dwij by cultivating virtues. Anyone who has refined his qualities, deeds and nature by inner cleanliness, becomes a dwij.

The above two points were the main social supports of the Gayatri-movement and the yagna-movement. In the opinion of the social-scientists, Gurudev strengthened the above two and gave a new direction for a silent revolution in the society. Their effect was not immediately felt, but over 10 years from 1961 to 1971 the 4000 yagnas gradually produced their effect by bringing the various castes nearer and creating an atmosphere of fraternity.

Gurudev went practically to every yagna. Along with the yagna there used to be 'Yug Nirman Sammelan (conferences for creating a new era). Thus, Gurudev conducted nearly all these conferences. He was loved by all because wherever he went he distributed love by his compassion and create a dedication in the people for 'Yug Nirman andolan' (movement for the creation of new era). This writer had the good fortune to go with him from place to place for over 5 continuous years and has seen the serenity, simplicity, love and greatness of Gurudev and seen him both as a historical person and as an incarnation.

As a leader at all these programmes, he never imposed himself although he was the centre of all the activities. he tried to be as much as in the background as possible. Like Gandhiji he always travelled by the ordinary class (III class in those

days) where the seats were of wooden sheets without padding. For long-distance travels it used to be very tiring. Yet during all these journeys Gurudev used to continue his writing-work also. Many a time, members of the Gayatri-family tried to buy for him a first- class tickets, but Gurudev firmly denied it. One such incident comes to this writer's mind. There was a conference for 4 days and about 12,000 disciples attended.

Everyone wanted to meet Gurudev in person and Gurudev met everyone of them at the rate of 3000 persons per day. Because he listened to each person and exchanged views with him, he did not even get time for taking rest. Some people wanted to buy a ticket for air-conditioned railway-travel while some thought that a first-class ticket would provide comfort as well as open air. When Gurudev came to know of this plan, be called the concerned persons and said that there was no need to waste public-money. I travel by the third class only.

I do not require reservation also, because my time will pass easily by talking to the travellers. I shall also do some writing. During long travels he used to continue writing till 1.30 a.m. in the night. He used to be particularly careful not to disturb the co-passengers with the railway's overhead light. For this purpose, he used to carry his own lamp.

Gurudev was also particular about carrying only that much luggage which could be easily carried by him. Wherever he went, the mission's workers were always at the station to receive him. On his return to Mathura also, there would be some disciples to receive him. Once when he returned to Mathura along with a disciple, the station was empty and there was no porter also. The mission-worker went ahead looking for a porter.

Suddenly he realised that he had done something wrong because on turning round he found that Gurudev had carried the luggage of both of them and started walking towards the exit. The young man was ashamed and rushed to Gurudev to carry the luggage. Gurudev then told him, “It's all right, son I am a poor brahmin and am used to carrying my own luggage." The young man felt even more ashamed. Gurudev was not angry with the young companion, but by this example he showed his workers how they should carry out their personal work.

Also, if he had to stay as a guest of someone, he was extremely careful not to disturb his home. Gurudev used to arise between 2 to 3 o'clock in the morning. He would also instruct his companion that on getting up in the morning, they

should not make noise and disturb the household. This shows that he used to be sensitive to the comforts of others and in the process if he had to bear discomfort, he would bear it because for him the feelings of others were more important. An incident very clearly indicates this.

Once Gurudev went with a companion to the home of the mission's worker at Bilaspur. He was not at home, only his wife was present. On seeing Gurudev at her doorstep, she became highly emotional because of her sincere respect and love for Gurudev. Her only desire was to please Gurudev, but was confused about what to offer and how to make Gurudev happy. So, she rushed into the kitchen and brought two glasses of milk but in a hurry, she had added salt to the milk instead of sugar.

Gurudev drank the milk at a stretch and praised her love and hospitality, but Gurudev's campanion was not able to drink the milk. With the first gulp only, he said that salt has been added to the milk. The lady was very much upset. But Gurudev immediately saved the situation and said, 'my child, the milk in my glass was sweet, may be his glass had salt added to it. The lady understood everything in a moment and said, "No no, Gurudev, I added the salt from one tin only, please forgive me". On coming out, Gurudev scolded his companion and said, "of course salt was added to the milk, but what would be lost if you drank the milk? At the most your bowels would be cleaned up. You should not hurt someone's feelings in this manner". Throughout the way Gurudev was feeling pained thinking about the young lady's disturbed state of mind.

Another incident comes to mind, this time at Naila in Madhya Pradesh, where a Gayatri-Sammelan (conference) was being held. Instead of reaching at 8 o'clock in the night, the train reached at 11 p.m. at night. Even then there was a big crowd of devotees and workers at the station. Gurudev made a speech there and reached around 1 o'clock after midnight at his host's house. There the host Sheth Motilal's wife said that she had prepared dinner and kheer (a flavoured sweet-dish of rice-cooked in milk) with her own hands specially for Gurudev, but Gurudev must have taken his dinner elsewhere.

She was naturally disappointed. Gurudev's companion told this story to Gurudev and immediately Gurudev said, "Call her quickly". The moment she came, Gurudev said, "My dear child, how did you come to know that since one week I have a keen desire to eat kheer? Somehow no body served kheer. Now go and bring kheer quickly for me". She was overcome with happiness and ran to bring

the kheer. Gurudev took one spoonful, and distributed the rest to the mission's workers gathered there.

An outstanding quality of Gurudev was a severe simplicity for himself and a liberal attitude for his associates. During a tour of Assam, I have seen Gurudev eating only puffed rice and roasted grams. I could not manage as such and Gurudev came to know from my dejected expression. "If you do not like it, do not eat puffed rice and roasted grams. Buy the food of your liking." he said with love.

One more example of his attitude of suffering silently comes to mind. This was the time of a yagna at Anand in Gujarat. Gurudev had high fever when he started from Mathura for Anand. While we were leaving, Mataji advised us to take care and look after Gurudev. When we arrived at Anand, Gurudev told us not to tell other that he was having fever. The people of Anand took Gurudev in a welcome-procession and he also addressed the people.

We thought that this will strain his health. So I went to the bazaar, bought sweet-lime, prepared its juice and gave it to him to drink for sustenance. He thought it was water and took one gulp and immediately spat it out, grimaced and said, "What madness is this? People do not get food to eat, and I am made to drink sweet-lime- juice? We should be ashamed. We are not able to provide milk to the children of mission's workers who have given up their established business and come to work at Tapobhoomi. How could you think that I can drink this juice and leave them as such?"

When Gurudev was giving a lecture at Raipur in Madhya Pradesh state, I saw that his kurta (long shirt-like garment) was torn in front. After the lecture, we both went to our accommodation. Gurudev opened his tiny tin trunk and I saw two more torn kurtas inside. I stood with open mouthed surprise at this. Gurudev said, "What are you standing there for? I said, "Gurudev, all three of your kurtas are torn. I cannot make out how to repair them." He called me near him, took out one kurta, tore it, gave it to me and said, "Take this, from it you can repair the other two."

Here is an example of Gurudev's compassion for the oppressed. Gurudev was going to Ajmer. A woman in the same compartment was crying continuously. Gurudev could not bear to see her sobbing. He asked her throughout the journey the reason for her unhappiness. With great difficulty, the woman revealed that she was going to Mathura to meet "Some Guruji".

Perhaps he may give her "Peace of mind". Gurudev asked her the reason for her unhappiness. At first the woman avoided the issue and asked, "What can you do even if you came to know?" Gurudev said that the "Guruji" whom she wants to meet is well-known to him and he can easily arrange for her to meet him. After consoling her in this manner, Gurudev got down when the train halted at some station, brought some water and made her drink it. She then told her story and said that her husband had died a month back and her in-laws were harassing her and parents were not willing to help her.

At Ajmer station many people had come to receive Gurudev. The woman was astounded to see that the person who brought water for her at a mid-station was the very same Guruji whom she wanted to meet. She fell at his feet.

Gurudev gave her courage and asked Ajmer's branch-workers to provide her accommodation. Throughout his stay at Ajmer, Gurudev frequently talked to her and advised her to forget her grief by trying to help other suffering souls. The woman who wanted to commit suicide four days earlier, changed her mind after receiving Gurudev's advice and decided on a new course of life.

In yet another incident at Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh, Gurudev was sitting in a lecture attended by 200 women. Gurudev's attention was drawn to a young woman who was looking very sad and worried and sitting very quietly. After the lecture was over, he called the young lady and asked her tenderly, "My child, what is troubling you? Tell me. I don't want to see you crying but want you to be laughing happily. The girl choked with emotion and said, "As such I have no problem. I am serving in a school and not living in want. The only trouble is that wherever I go people avoid me and treat me with contempt. I am a widow and therefore am considered inauspicious during social occasions, and therefore extremely unhappy.

Gurudev said quickly, “My child, you are pure as the river Ganga. Anyone who looks at you will himself feel honoured and fulfilled. This is not my talk but from the Vedas and the scriptures". The girl burst out into sobs. The clouded thinking of other women at the seminar also cleared up at this. Thus, along with conducting the yagnas and giving direction to the society for creating a new order, Gurudev brought light into the lives of individuals. But the same Gurudev whose heart bled for the miseries of others was detached in his personal life.

Once when Gurudev was out of Mathura for 40 days for conducting yagnas at various places, Gurudev received a telegram at Rourkela in Madhya Pradesh

giving the sad news of the death of Taiji, Gurudev's mother, and asking him to return immediately. Gurudev read it, closed his eyes for two minutes, then said, "All the programmes will go on as planned, not a single programme will be cancelled. He received a similar message at Rajnandgaon. When others pressed him to return to Mathura, Gurudev explained, “It is not a question of plans, but of determination" and immediately ordered that not a single programme will be cancelled. In the next programme at Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, a messenger brought a special message from Mataji to return, but Guruji was firm in his resolve. Only after completing all the programmes, Gurudev went back to Mathura.

Sometimes in the Yagna-programme, Gurudev would find that when he arrived at a place for the programme, nothing would be ready. In such a situation, he would take the matter in his hands, call the branch-workers and devotees and work along with them to make the programme a success. Such a thing happened at Shujalpur in Madhya Pradesh. Where 100-kundiya Gayatri yagna was to be performed. The mission's workers from Mathura reached there in advance and found that there was absolutely no preparation, not even the basics. They advised Gurudev by telegram to cancel the programme because of a total lack of preparations. The same day Gurudev replied, "The programme will be carried out definitely. Meet the people and start preparations".

The programme was just 3 days away. The advance-team from Mathura took the local branch-workers with them to prosperous people in the area and informed them about the Gayatri- yagna mission as well as the reason for calling upon them and requested their co-operation. To their utter surprise every person whom they visited, agreed to help. The local workers were more amazed, because, they said that earlier the same persons had refused to give even ten rupees. Thus, it became a miracle and within three days everything was ready. Gurudev had come one day earlier. At that time the Yagna-shala (the room for conducting the 100-kundiya yagna) was under construction. Gurudev was present throughout the night for giving a helping hand. And lo and behold! the welcome-procession started and the yagna started on due date. Nearly 7000 people took part and it was the most successful programme in the district.

Gurudev used to tell the mission's workers. -we are not sending you to sit on the stage or to give lectures. This is done very nicely by political leaders because they are good orators. But you are different. You have to think yourself to be the soldiers of the DIVINE and act accordingly. When you go with this attitude, the

programme will be successful and you will receive divine blessings. The mission's workers did have a similar experience at Harsa Katena in Uttar Pradesh state, where a 5-kundiya yagna was to planned. Gurudev could not go there for some reason and sent a representative. There he found a total lack of preparations and the branch-worker called Shri Devi was very much depressed.

Shri Devi also informed Gurudev's representative that when she had planned this programme, she had no idea of the local situation and about her own incapacity or incapability. So she requested cancellation of the programme. The representative said that Gurudev has sent him here for conducting the programme, and hence he will see to it that it would be carried out. Now regarding co-operation, he and Shri Devi are there and they have Gurudev's blessings with them. So, they should start meeting people.

Accordingly, they met the people, arranged the necessary paraphernalia. Shri Devi persuaded five persons to sit at the yagna for offering oblations and with the help of these five people, prepared Yagna-pits during the night, prepared an awning, prepared a dais, and also spread durries in front for devotees and others interested in worship. After that day's programme, the audience was told that if they liked the programme, they should bring their friends and relatives the next day. The effect was electric. The next day the attendance increased by nearly ten times and on the fourth day the number increased to about 2500 people in a small village.

The above are only a few examples from the hundreds. The mission's workers were merely the instruments. The real miracle was wrought by Gurudev himself.

REVIVAL OF THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION OF THE ANCIENT SAGES (1971 to 1984)

During the 1960-61 journey to Divine Guru Sarveshwaranand, Gurudev was directed to spread the message for the coming era through Gayatri yagnas and Yug Nirman Sammelans (conferences) during the next 10 years. After doing whatever was possible during these ten years, Gurudev was asked to leave Mathura and devote more time to penance and worship in seclusion.

As 1971 approached, Gurudev started gradually distributing his responsibilities to others for disengaging himself. When he started giving hints, people started realising that now he will not mingle freely with them and also will not be easily approachable as before. This was indeed sad news to all the devotees because they loved him deeply.

That moment approached on 20th June 1971 when Gurudev would officially retire from the Yug Nirman movement. A send- off get-together took place at Mathura where 400,000 people attended. Gurudev told them, "I am now going. You may feel that I am going away from you, but that is not so. You will actually experience that I have come nearer to you. I will be living in your minds and souls in the form of Divine Inspiration, and continue inspiring you to fulfil your responsibilities.

Gurudev and Mataji left together and came to Haridwar, the same Haridwar where the Divine Guru had directed Gurudev to build a centre where the Ganga divides into seven tributaries in homage to the seven sages. While Gurudev was conducting the mission from Mathura, the Shantikunj Ashram was built. In those days the Ashram was a small building with 16 rooms with one room for Goddess Gayatri and the continuously burning lamp (Akhand Deepak). There was one room for Mataji. Besides there were rooms for resident girl-disciple (Devkanya) who also recited Gayatri mantra regularly at the temple of Goddess Gayatri. On the ground floor, there was an office and premises for 3 workers of the mission. The remaining rooms were used as guest-accommodation.

Gurudev arrived from Mathura to Shantikunj After staying for a few hours at Shantikunj, while Mataji remained there, Gurudev left again for Himalayas to meet his Divine Guru Sarveshwaranandji, who told him this time about reviving the spiritual tradition of the ancient sages. He reminded Gurudev that on his previous visit, the sages who had revealed themselves to him, had expressed grief about the disappearance of the traditions established by them.

At that time Gurudev Sarveshwaranand had promised them that the traditions will be revived and now the time had come to fulfil that promise. While writing in detail about that conversation in his will, Gurudev says that in that promise lay the responsibility for reviving traditions in the next 14 years as follows:

1) In the tradition of Rishi Vishvamitra, to inform the population about the strength of the Gayatri mantra and to establish a siddhapeeth - a centre for its propagation.

2) In the tradition of Rishi Vyas, to rewrite and publish ancient literature, related literature and start writing the Pragya- Puran.

3) In the tradition of Rishi Patanjali, the dissemination of the Yogic-science and its philosophy.

4) In the tradition of Rishi Parshuram, to prepare an atmosphere for cleansing the minds of the people for removing immorality.

5) In the Bhagirath-tradition, to spread knowledge to each and every home.

6) In the tradition of Rishi Charak, to discover herbal medicines, research and co-ordination and trials.

7) In tradition of Rishi Yagnavalkya, control of disorders of the mind etc.

8) In the tradition of Rishi Jamdagni to establish centres for spiritual upliftment and start of sacramental rites.

9) In the Narada-tradition, to spread the light of religion through the mission's followers.

10) In the Aryabhatt-tradition, guidance of the country's ad- ministration through religion.

11) In the Shankaracharya-tradition, establishment of religious-centres from place to place.

12) In the Pippalad-tradition, to establish the principles of diet for taking care of one's health.

13) Kanad tradition for co-ordinating spiritualism with science

14) Sutashownik tradition for conducting Pragya-programmes from place to place for educating the masses.

In 1971-journey to Himalayas, Gurudev spent nearly six months near the root of the Ganga, the Jamuna and nearby areas. It is well-known that in 1971 India was attacked by Pakistan, there was a continuous flow of refugees - 3 million - into India and India was tortured while the big western powers were hypocritically advising India instead of helping her. Also, when India retaliated against Pakistan, America sent its extremely mighty 7th fleet with nuclear warheads to attack India on the eastern shores. But within a short while events took a somersault and the fleet retreated, and in the next 2 weeks Pakistan was routed in east Pakistan which is now Bangladesh.

Spiritualists say that the visit of Gurudev Shriram Sharma to Himalayas is very significant. They attribute the sudden change of American attitude and India's routing of Pakistan to the spiritual energy generated somewhere in the Himalayas.

Also, during 1975 when the Government of India imposed an emergency on the people, Gurudev opposed it and advised the workers of the mission to give shelter to those trying to hide from the police.

While Guruji returned in January 1972, he remained in Shantikunj for about 5 days and gave instructions to Mataji. Mataji recruited more girls at the Shantikunj Ashram for the non-stop relay-recitations of the Gayatri mantra. Gurudev returned after a month and started "Pratyavartan Shibir" In these workshops, the devotees were taught special occult worships for spiritual development and for absorbing divine brightness. During these 4-day-workshops, the devotees could not mostly meet Gurudev. They were also asked not to leave their quarters.

Most people were not able to cope up with this mode of worship. Then the mode of worship was changed to a more suitable one to help more people to take advantage. Around 24 such workshops were conducted upto 1975. Gurudev indirectly supported the devotees with his own powers. A number of devotees experienced Shaktipaat (flow of energy from Gurudev into them) and also Kundalini Jagran (the ultimate in the achievement of yoga whereby one achieves self- actualisation and unity with the supreme). After six months the above workshops were replaced by Jeevan Sadhana workshops (for leading a purposeful life). These devotees were required to recite Gayatri-mantras 24,000 times.

Gurudev had many devotees spread over the world in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Fiji, Cambodia, New Zealand, Kenya, Uganda, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, America etc. He visited many countries in 1972 during a journey of 45 days. During this time, he addressed intellectuals and scientists on the scientific aspects of the Gayatri Mantra.

1972 saw the beginning of the development of Shantikunj as a Gayatri-centre-cum-pilgrimage-centre. The main programmes started from there include the proclamation of women's awakening movement, establishment of Gayatri Shaktipeeths (centres) and Pragya-Sansthans (intellectual centres) throughout the country and establishment of Brahmavarchas Shodh Sansthan for research on a rapport between science and spiritualism. It was announced in 1975 that the young ladies who had grown up under the guidance of reverend Mataji would now start going out to address women's conferences. The young ladies proved their mettle at these conferences.

Coming to the establishment of Shaktipeeths, the original target was to have only 24 Shaktipeeths, but ultimately, they numbered 2400. During 1981-82, Gurudev did go for laying the corner-stone for a few of these centres, then stopped going altogether. The dynamic workers at these missions, not only young, but even the elderly Vanprasthas (those in their fifties and sixties) work tirelessly to spread Gurudev's divine message.

Simultaneously Gurudev started the programmes for the revival of the 14 traditions mentioned earlier and as part of the programme for dissemination of knowledge, his pen did not stop writing until the day he left this mortal world. The literature created by him is stupendous. All the 14 programmes, starting from 1971 to 1984 at Shantikunj are still being continued by the able followers of Gurudev Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya. Now the Shantikunj of 16 rooms in 1971 has grown into a township where worship in pure form continues and from where the Divine Message of Gayatri and Gurudev gushes forth in a mighty flow to guide the people to lead pure, untainted and spiritual lives. Groups of trained mission-workers have gone to foreign countries also for spreading the Divine message in this disturbed world.

ENTERING THE ETHER AND CASTING THE MORTAL FRAME (1984 to 1990)

Gurudev went to the Himalayas in 1984 for the fourth and possibly the last time. Regarding his meet with the Divine power guiding him i.e. Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand, he once said, "The journey was difficult as usual, reaching Gomukh, meeting Veerbhadra and reaching Tapovan easily, the same as before. The difference was that this time I was told to come in the ethereal body-form. The greetings and blessings-formality was over within a moment. Immediately the Divine Guru started saying, “Upto now what was told and done through you was local and simple. Leading people have been doing this kind of work earlier also. but now what we are asking you is on a much bigger scale."

"Both the physical and the ethereal atmospheres have become extremely polluted these days. Not only man but the existence of all the life on this planet is in danger. The future is full of challenges. To tackle this situation, you will have to become 5 beings from the one being that you are. You have to divide yours power into five sections and take work from them. These five will be responsible for freeing the atmosphere from pollution, development of talents, removal of destructive possibilities and, creating hopeful conditions for and bringing a bright future. To make this possible, only the minimum work to be done by the physical body while working for the evolution of the ethereal part".

From the Vasant Panchami of 1984 Gurudev stopped meeting people. Even the mission-workers had not seen him for some days. Mataji used to tell us that we should not think that something is wrong with him. He is in the company of his Guru, and entering from the physical into the ethereal. He is neither tired nor trying to escape, but strengthening and expanding his powers on a much larger scale. Describing his withdrawal, he had said earlier, that this is the silence which is adopted before undertaking a vast campaign.

In those days Gurudev wrote that a soul living in the physical body, but dedicated to the service of the supreme, can get the work done through five bodies only in special or unusual situations. If the work is of such a nature that it has to be carried out by 5 different bodies for a very long time, then mundane work by the physical, human body will have to be stopped. One of my five bodies has been specially appointed to help the unhappy, incapable and the suffering people.

People coming to have Gurudev's darshan (to have a look and to bow down) were very unhappy because he had withdrawn himself and was not available at all. The highly compassionate Gurudev could not bear this and fixed the

morning-time to grant darshan. The method adopted was as follows: Gurudev used to sit in his room and do his writing; his room's window was kept open for a fixed time for those wanting darshan.

Two years passed in this way. In 1988, Gurudev said in the spring season, 'It is possible that Guruji (i.e. himself) will complete 80 years of life. From this viewpoint Mataji will also be active till the same age. Now the time for my leaving this earth is nearer. The moment I finish the unavoidable tasks given to me, I shall hand over the responsibility to others. There may be doubts that under them the progress may halt and disorder prevail. but those who are capable of looking deeper, know that this mission is not run by mortals but by the supreme. In the common language of the people, a baazigar (magician) is running it. If some fault occurs, he will correct it. The loss or gain will be his. Everyone should think in this way about the mission's future and should not allow disappointment to come nearby.

The next year he said in the spring festival that those who want to see me after my body is no more, will see me in my thoughts (inscribed in my literature). That itself is my original power. Even then many people could not come to believe that Gurudev is telling about leaving the mortal body.

Regarding the process of entering into an ethereal plane, Gurudev explained, "Now a new chapter starts for this life. I have extracted as much work from this body of bones and flesh, as necessary. Now I have to perform more important tasks. These will be carried on by the ethereal bodies only. You must believe that upto the end of this decade, I shall be working with the rarified ethereal body and you will be able to see and experience the results of those works.

One more year passed and came spring of the year 1990. Gurudev said that the next ten years is a period of confluence of two millennia, a period of transition. "You may or may not see this mortal body, but this soldier appointed for special tasks, will fulfil his responsibilities with full awareness." Even after these words, the devotees were not believing that Gurudev will cast off the mortal frame. He called a special meeting of his disciples on 30th April 1990 and instructed the workers to arrange six large brahmayagnas in six large cities of India. He instructed them to light 100,000 Deepak’s (wick-lamps)

Then one day Gurudev wrote this message, "The transformation of the era is decided properly. Upto the year 2000, it will be the dawn of the confluence of the two eras. Thoughtful, visionary people should work with aggressiveness and

enthusiasm during this period. They should display the courage to stand in the front-line. They should work heart-and-soul for giving courage to the people and for personal as well as people's salvation."

One day Gurudev said, "When I leave this body, do not expect me to return in it, nor should you have any attachment for this body. The cremation of this body should be performed on the platform at the entrance of the Gayatri-Tirth at Shantikunj. The remnants after the cremation should be kept on the "Prakhar Pragna" erected nearby. The nearby place is kept for Mataji. She will live among you and after me, she will herself guide you". He also gave other directions in connection with the last rites. He said specifically that his body should not be kept for a viewing by the devotees, but the cremation must be carried out immediately on the day of Gayatri Jayanti which comes on 2nd June 1990.

Eight days before the above date, Gurudev gave up taking food and water, and told his followers that the time has come to enter the ethereal plane and merge with Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand and work just like him in the ethereal world through ethereal powers and in ethereal form.

The historical day of 2nd June 1990 arrived. The sun was about to rise. Gurudev folded his hands and said, "O Divine Mother, I bow my head at your Divine Feet" and left the mortal body.

At that time Mataji was addressing about 7000 workers. At the moment when Gurudev left his mortal body, Mataji wiped tears from her eyes, then continued her lecture. After the lecture, she informed the devotees that Gurudev has cast off his body and is now pervading among us and we should let him manifest inside us and make us deserving of his grace.

REVEREND MATAJI (1926-1994)

In June 1971 Gurudev made his historic move from Mathura to Shantikunj at Haridwar for the 14-year programme from 1971 to 1984 as we have seen in chapter Ten. He had announced that he will undertake severe penances for the situation to be favourable for the transformation of the era. He told the mission-workers that now he will not be travelling frequently for the various programmes as he had done in the earlier years.

Now he will use his time and attention for developing capable persons and also for the eradication of the prevailing devilish tendencies. This was also an announcement of withdrawal from the Gayatri mission's movement. he also said that in his place or in his absence, reverend mother will provide the organisation and the mission's movement with the same quality of guidance as was received from himself personally. In fact, the workers will receive even more love and indulgence.

No doubt, Gurudev's blessings will be there, but Mataji's love for her children - the workers and devotees - with the warmth of a mother's love, will encompass them in the soft cocoon of sweet security. And the devotees observed that reverend Mataji shouldered the entrusted responsibility with natural ease. In fact, Gurudev's and Mataji's power is one and the same. They are but the twins of the same entity.

To the outsiders or people coming to Yug Nirman Mission after 1971, Mataji may have been an unknown person, but people who had already worked with rev. Gurudev were quite familiar with the loving nature of Mataji and they were very well aware that Gurudev and Mataji were on this earth for one purpose only. It is not a mere coincidence that Mataji was born in the same year that the Divine Guru manifested before Gurudev Shriram when he was just 15, i.e. in September 1926 at Agra.

Born in a famous priestly family, Bhagwati Devi was extraordinary in her own way and unlike other children, was not interested in playing etc. Instead, she was more interested in worship and looking after the guests. She would welcome the visitors and the needy with warmth, bring drinking water and arrange for their lunch or dinner etc... There were servants for this type of work in their household, but Mataji looked after the guests with great love, and the visitors also always wanted to meet her and talk to her.

The only subject that was dearest to her was worship of God. She used to spend most of her time in singing devotional songs and remembering God. Her favourite pastime was to make the offering of the leaves of the bilva tree at the image of Lord Shiva, who loves bilva leaves. She would bring a variety to the above offerings by sometimes writing the symbol for the word "Om" meaning God, sometimes "namah Shivaya" (obeisance to Lord Shiva) and sometimes recite mantras while making the offerings. After starting her education, she first studied the Bhagwad Gita. The second book she studied was 'Ramcharit manas' She had already memorised 'Gayatri Sahastranam' (one thousand names of Gayatri) and she was also regularly reading the 'Devi Bhagwat Puran'.

After reading these scriptures Bhagwati Devi did not think it necessary to study in the higher standards in the school. The parents also understood her inclinations. Her attire was simple, and she wore very simple types of dress at an age when most girls pay great attention to colour, quality and style of dress. At the age of 14 years in 1940, when she had nothing to do with India's freedom movement, she had already started wearing handloom cloth.

In those days it was customary to think of girl's engagement when she was 10-12 years old. Father Jashwant Rao naturally started thinking along those lines. When Bhagwati Devi came to know of this, she told in no uncertain terms that nobody should worry about it because her life's companion was involved in preparations and when the time was ripe, the marriage will be arranged very easily. It was natural for the near-ones not to take this hint seriously and they started looking for a groom for her on their own. Forget about the search being successful.

Instead, some curious, unexplainable events started occurring and the relatives had to give up. One of these is a dream which came to Bhagwati Devi's fufa (father's sister's husband). In the dream he saw the vision of Lord Shiva and his consort Mata Parvati, and found himself chanting a devotional mantra praising them. Both of them were benevolently smiling at him. Mata Parvati said, "My son is trying to separate me from my lord." Then he saw in the dream that Mata Parvati laughed aloud and said, "Your efforts will be in vain. Instead of wasting your energy in this direction, utilise it in good cause". This uncle of Bhagwati Devi used to say that he found the voice familiar but could not recognise it in his sleep. In the morning, he realised it to be Bhagwati Devi's voice. Then he never thought of worrying about betrothal of his favourite Bhagwati Devi.

Now we shall refer to Bhagwati Devi as Mataji. As predicted by Mataji, her marriage was arranged very easily. It so happened that at some social function, both the families came to know each other and liked each other. They visited each other, and by the third meeting Taiji had decided on Mataji as the bride for her son Shriram. They were married in the year in which Gurudev had come to Mathura at the behest of his Divine Guru. Mataji came from a prosperous family, but Gurudev had, like the Christian priests, taken the vow of poverty. Mataji too had taken a vow in her childhood, of simple living and penance, so it was not at all difficult for Mataji to live in great simplicity in her new abode and yet look after her husband as well as the visitors.

On coming to Mathura, Mataji relieved Gurudev from the responsibility of looking after visitors and guests. In those days the members of the Gayatri-family were not more than a thousand. Even then daily four to five persons visited Gurudev. Mataji made it a rule that whosoever came to their home will be served a meal. The visitors used to bring their own food because they knew that they were going to an aparigrahi (one who does not accept anything from anyone) brahmin. Mataji on the other hand firmly started the custom of feeding every visitor and hence they were forced to give up their shyness. On the one hand the visitor used to be relieved because Gurudev showed a solution to their bodily and mental problems and explained spiritual difficulties, and on the other hand Mataji's loving and homely care left him fully satisfied.

Later Gurudev shifted to the larger house which was haunted as we have seen in an earlier chapter. There in the fifteen-room house, Guruji finished the remaining part of his 24 mahapurashcharans (one mahapurashcharan or recitation of 24,00,000 Gayatri mantras each) The number of visitors also increased. By the time this number became sizable, the Gayatri Tapobhoomi building was ready for accommodation. In this centre i.e. Gayatri Tapobhoomi Mataji's role was the most important of all.

Gurudev had taken a vow of not accepting anything from anyone for personal use and also a vow of leading an ascetic life. With such a vow it was impossible even to imagine the creation of such a large complex as the Tapobhoomi. But it was God's will. The members of the mission did make token contributions, but that was a mere trickle Mataji made her own contribution on 20-4-1956 by laying open the box of personal jewellery before Gurudev. These were presented to her by her family at her marriage. This was the largest contribution, made willingly

by Mataji without pressure from anyone, not even Gurudev, and became immensely useful in purchasing the land for the Tapobhoomi.

The Gayatri Tapobhoomi became ready and in 1958 the first major event in the mission's history, i.e., the 1000-kundiya Gayatri Yagna took place. Day-by-day the Gayatri-family started in- creasing. Whatever the number of visitors, Mataji took charge of their hospitality. When someone advised her that the visitor should make his own arrangements for meals because practically the whole day Mataji had to spend in kitchen, Mataji's reply was typical. She said, "My son, when children come home to their mother, how would it look if she asked them to eat outside? You people are coming here to the home of Mother Gayatri. She would be very unhappy if I told you all to take your food outside". Not only was this visitor satisfied by Mataji's answer but his faith in her was strengthened much more.

Two and a half years after the 1000-Kundiya Yagna Gurudev went to the Himalayas for nearly one year. At that time Mataji had to shoulder many of Gurudev's responsibilities besides looking after the visitors or guests. Gurudev's responsibilities mainly involved the editing and publishing of various magazines, ad- ministration of the Gayatri-Tapobhoomi-complex and administration of the Yug-Nirman mission. Gurudev returned after one year, and immediately shatasutriya Yug Nirman Yojana was proclaimed (creation of a new era based on shatasutra or 100- maxims) and throughout the country gayatri-yagnas and conferences were planned, and one 1000-kundiya Yagna each was performed respectively at Porbander in Gujarat state, Baharaich in Uttar Pradesh state, Mahasamund in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Bhilwada in the state of Rajasthan and in Bihar state's Tatanagar. And in all these Yagnas Mataji was always present with Gurudev.

In those days of the Yug Nirman movement, for 10 years Gurudev was frequently away from Mathura, and only Mataji looked after the centre in his absence at Mathura. Since the Gayatri family was spread all over India and the magazines were also going throughout India, many readers as well as devotees started corresponding regularly on various subjects and personal problems too. Mataji replied to these letters either personally or dictated her answers to her associates. These answers gave tremendous satisfaction to the people who had addressed their queries. Many devotees also experienced that much before the written replies were received, the same used to be conveyed by telepathy.

To give an example, Bhavanibhai from Porbander used to say that he would resolve to recite one mahapurashcharan of Gayatri-mantra within one year and start it. After a regularity of some days, some obstacle would force him to discontinue the recitation. This happened six times. Before starting his purushcharan he used to write to Gurudev and every time received his blessings through a letter and tell him that necessary arrangements have been made for protection and for forgiving any lapses on the part of the devotee. Yet Bhawanibhai would not be convinced and wanted to start afresh.

Finally, when he wrote for the 7th time, on the next day in his morning-prayers he heard a very gentle female voice lovingly telling him, “After receiving the assurance of protection and forgiveness for any lapses, you should continue the recitations despite any type of difficult circumstances. If you cannot recite the regular prescribed number of times, complete the remainder on the next day or when feasible" Then there was silence.

Bhavanibhai received the written reply after a week, in Mataji's own handwriting. Besides other matter, the lines referred to above were also there. Although he had accepted the above advice one week earlier, the written reply reinforced his faith that once you have given the responsibility to Gurudev why should you doubt its fulfilment? So Bhavanibhai started his recitations with renewed faith and vigour and was able to complete it in time despite three obstacles in between.

After 1971 when Gurudev returned from Himalayas for his 14-year-programme for the revival of the traditions established by the 14 rishis(sages), Mataji had to take charge of the activities of the mission from Shantikunj, Haridwar. She carried out all her responsibilities in a very able manner. She would always tell, "I am not doing anything. Everything is done by Gurudev. I am a mere devotee working under his directions". On one occasion she said, "People look upon me as Gurudev's wife. however, I consider myself as his disciple and follower".

After coming to Shantikunj at Haridwar in 1971, 24 maha- purushcharan of 24,00,000 recitations each of Gayatri mantra were performed there under the direction of Mataji. Unlike Gurudev's 24 maha or mega-recitations over 24 years, the same was to be completed over six years only. Gurudev's penance was for creating a great energy for worship and penance. The mega- recitations under Mataji's supervision were for changing the situations and making them amenable for the transformation of the era.

In this programme, first 6 young girls started reciting the mantra, and then a team of 12 girls started the same. The wick- lamp given by Dada Guru Sarveshwaranand was kept in front of a picture of Mother Gayatri and this mega-purushcharan was preformed there.

After six months Gurudev returned from the Himalayas, stayed for a few days and went back to Himalayas, as we have seen earlier. When he returned again to Shantikunj, he went into seclusion for more severe occult penances. Then also Mataji's responsibilities were as large and as serious as before. Correspondence, meeting visitors and advising them, looking after the administration of the increasing Shantikunj-complex, conducting the different activities which were started at the Ashram, editing the magazines etc.

In 1975 Yug Nirman Andolan (movement) opened one more flank, and proclaimed the Mahila Jagran Abhiyan (or the campaign for the awakening of women). Within a short span 4000 branches of Mahila Jagran Abhiyan were opened with more than one million women taking part. Its work was not limited to slogan-shouting, but involved activity in such fields as women's education, economic self-support, sacraments rites and cultivation of self-respect (instead of humiliation), removal of the dowry- system and fight against torture of women.

Mataji did not leave Shantikunj from 1971 to 1991... During this time various types of workshops were conducted on worship and other subjects. The number of attendees varied from five to two thousand. Mataji considered them all as part of her family, and for her it was of prime importance to arrange their accommodation, food and safe return etc. Even in her absence these could be arranged, but it was Mataji's belief that all the comforts and care in a 5-star Hotel cannot equal the peace and satisfaction that one gets when cared for by a loving mother.

People do not come to Shantikunj as tourists but for charging themselves anew and for experiencing peace, and therefore the presence of a mother's reign is very necessary here. it was this consideration for the welfare of the guests that prevented her from leaving Shantikunj for 20 long years. At the most, if she felt like it, she would go for an evening- walk with Gurudev to Har-ki-Paudi or Jwalapur. This went on till 1985 when Gurudev went into total seclusion for preparation to enter the ethereal plane.

After Gurudev cast off his mortal frame, the entire responsibility for the mission came on Mataji. It is but natural that when you love a person dearly with total faith in him, you like to be near his physical presence and do not like to think of the departure of his physical body. But nobody can prevent this phenomenon of nature. Thus, when Gurudev left his physical body, it became a severe and unbearable blow for most of his followers.

This event should have been even more painful to Mataji, who was, after all, nearest to him. But she looked after the devotees with total presence of mind, and gave them courage. From the time of Gurudev leaving the physical body to the cremation and even afterwards, Mataji consoled all the workers of the mission visiting her with the understanding and patience of a mother. The sobbing workers would leave after receiving courage and inspiration from her to complete the unfinished tasks of Gurudev.

As a result of her guidance, a shraddhanjali-samaroh (programme to pay tributes to Gurudev) was arranged in October 1990. 15,00,000 devotees attended and took with them the resolution to carry on the work of reverend Gurudev. After this programme at many places in India and abroad various programmes including tributes and brahma- yagna were carried out. It is estimated that in these programmes more than 50 million people came into contact with Yug Nirman mission.

In 1992, on the Gayatri Jayanti day, Mataji expressed a resolution for a vast-project... On this day two years ago, Gurudev had departed from this world. She said that Gurudev has instructed that for the spread of dev-sanskruti (spiritual-culture or religious - culture) on a large scale, Ashvamedha-yagnas should be performed. No sooner the announcement was made, requests poured in for these Yagnas. But because an Ashvamedha yagna requires pro- longed preparations on a very large-scale, the programmes were not decided for all the places, but for 26 Yagnas till the end of 1995.

When an Ashvamedha-yagna is to be performed at a particular place, first a vow or resolution is made one year in advance and different activities called prayaj, Yag and anuyaj are started. Propaganda and a programme for contacting the public through- out the year is started. Therefore, the innumerable places from where the requests had poured in, were linked to specific centres where the actual. Ashvamedha-yagnas were to be performed.

The first Ashvamedha yagna was performed at Jaipur in 1992. Till September 1995 eighteen Ashvamedha yagnas were performed and Mataji visited all these yagnas. Three Ashvamedha yagnas were performed abroad i.e. at Leicester (Britain), Toronto (Canada) and Los Angeles (U. S. A.). Tradition received a new direction with progressiveness and discretion included in it. Mataji initiated hundreds of thousands into the Gayatri mantra, a new wave of character-building and social reform started.

In programmes of mass-sacraments a new foundation for faith and dedication was laid down. It is but natural that political leaders get attracted to programmes where hundreds of thousands are present. In all these programmes, powerful political leaders came. They were told that they are always welcome to the function, but they should kindly shed their partisan attitude. When coming here, they should remember that they are followers or students of India's religious tradition and culture. Not only did these politicians remember this but also honoured it.

The result was that politicians, strongly opposed to each other in public arrived together in some Ashvamedha yagnas. Former Prime Ministers V. P. Singh, Chandrashekhar, Mulayamsinh Yadav, Kalyansinh, Central minster V. C. Shukla, Rameshwar Thakur, Bhaironsinh Shekhawat and Haridev Joshi, Digvijaysinh, Sunderlal Patwa, Former central minister Arjunsinh, Narayan Dutta Tiwari attended, besides a long list of politicians. Aside from these, intellectuals and artists too attended.

In March 1994, the 16th Ashvamedha yagna was performed at Chitrakoot in Uttar Pradesh. Earlier, Mataji had started saying that now her work is over. Gurudev has told me to hand over the future work in the hands of you, my children. Now he is hearing my fervent appeal and is willing to give me permission for giving rest to the shariryatra (i.e. the journey of this body on the earth).

So, after the Chitrakoot Ashvamedha-yagna, she started winding up her activities. At the time of the Ashvamedha yagna at Bhind in Madhya Pradesh, she told the mission-workers that they should carry out the programme. Similarly for Shimla Ashvamedha yagna also she suddenly changed her programme. After that she stopped going to any programme and curtailed her meetings with workers or visitors. Gradually that also stopped and like Gurudev she started remaining in seclusion for occult-worship.

In those days some workers said that Mataji is now preparing for Mahaprayan (journey away from this earth, i.e. to leave the human body). She and Gurudev are one and the same power. At the time of Gurudev's casting off the mortal body, Mataji was herself preparing to leave along with him but Gurudev had asked her to wait for few years. During these few years the sweep of the mission's work has expanded manifold.

On full-moon day in the month of Bhadrapad, on 19th Sept.'94 one-and-a-half months before Diwali, the festival of lights, she left the mortal shell to join her mentor, Gurudev.

The day on which Mataji cast off the mortal body, one of the workers of the mission had a peculiar experience. At that time, he was performing the 'Sandhya' (a ritual-prayer in which Gayatri- mantra is recited). He was reciting the mantra but a lot of questions were going on in his mind regarding Guruji and Mataji. The main question was, "Who is Guruji and who is Mataji? Are they ordinary human beings, great human beings, saints with divine powers, sages or some deities? These questions were mingled with doubts also. While his mind was immersed in these doubts he suddenly saw before him a reddish glow and Lord Shiva and Parvati on a snow-clad mountain shining in golden colour.

After a moment the scene changes. Two divine thrones are seen and in front of them many Yagna-kunds (pits) are seen. Theie divine forms, beautiful in appearance and clad in yellow garments, are offering oblations in holy fires. Then when he observed the thrones, he found reverend Gurudev and reverend Mataji sitting there. The next moment Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati are seen once again on the shining golden-coloured mountain. The devotee was very much shaken and opened his eyes. By evening- time he receives the information that Mataji has left this earth.

THE REASON FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

Gurudev's story is now before you. In reality these are merely memories. For who on this earth is capable of writing the full story of the life and works of this Divine Incarnation? Maharshi Yogi Arvind used to say, "The visible physical appearance of the incarnations appears ordinary. But the form not visible to the ordinary human eyes is many times more vast and as much more important, and that is their real life". Scriptures also tell the same thing when telling us about the unexplainable and occult aspects of God's divinity. Similarly, only Gurudev knows the secrets of his life and work on this earth. Those who received his grace may have understood him partly or fully. This writer merely remembers him with excuse of writing his biography. This effort is merely for my self-satisfaction.

This effort should have been started long ago, but I have no complaints for the long wait. Whatever has happened in my life, I consider it as a result of Gurudev's wish or ambition or direction and whatever the result, I was satisfied, so why be disappointed by the delay? But I must allude to the necessity and inspiration for this effort, so that one can understand its importance. The inspiration for the effort is linked with my long association with Gurudev, dedication to Gurudev and Mataji, their love and profound grace. the incidents in my personal and public-life are also related to them and therefore the background for this effort must be seen in this context.

My relations with all the family-members' of the Yug- Nirman Yojana, Gayatri-Parivar (family) and Pragya-Abhiyan (intellectual campaign) has been the same as in any family i.e. that of senior and junior. I came to Gayatri Tapobhoomi in 1967 and members of the mission have seen me carrying out the responsibilities allotted to me by Gurudev from that time onwards. Hence all the Parijans (members of the 'family') know about my activities, achievements and shortcomings.

But whatever (of my life) is unknown and my life before coming to the Tapobhoomi, has also been a fulfilled one as a result of the love showered by reverend Gurudev and reverend Mataji. When I look back upon my earlier life and summarise its successes and achievements, I find that their grace has been showered on me from the beginning. Had I not received their grace, climbing up the ladder of success would never have been possible, and the successes have not been just ordinary, but of an extraordinary level. Before coming to Tapobhoomi, I was so successful that my success could be easily compared with that of successful people born in very rich families.

Along with these achievements, the grace of this Divine couple has fulfilled my inner-life, inner-self also. To-day when I look back, I find that it would be impossible for a person born in my kind of situation to progress under ordinary circumstances. I was born in an ordinary brahmin family in Bharatpur state (now a district of Rajasthan state). As such also, conditions were not favourable. On top of that, it was as if fate had decided to play with me. I lost my mother at the age of one-and- a-half years, and the fate of such a child (who loses the warmth, love and protection of his mother) has only to be imagined.

When I was about ten years old, my father too, died. I had no brothers or sisters or near relatives from whom support could be expected. I was alone in the vast world and had to fend for myself. As a result, I started looking for work to do and started telling people about the sincerity of my work. This finally worked and I was employed in a small job. The salary was very meagre in exchange for work from morning till night. The hours were so long that I could not get time to prepare my meals also and had to depend on an eating-house in the local bazaar. Thus, life started gradually.

I was aware of being a brahmin. While running around during the job, while coming across some well-known people, I came to understand a few more things. One of these was a brahmin must wear a Yagnopavit or the sacrad-thread. The first step to achievement as a brahmin starts with the holy-thread only. Just as learning the alphabet is necessary for acquiring knowledge, so is the holy- thread necessary to climb the ladder to Brahmanatva (achievement of the knowledge of God to become one with HIM). After knowing this, the mind was constantly in turmoil, but there were plenty of problems.

In those days the sacramental rites for the holy-thread ceremony involved a lot of festivities and expenses. Relatives had to be invited, fan-fare was also involved and all the gathered relatives had to be fed, not only once but for several days. I myself was surviving with the meagerest means, so even imagining about the thread-ceremony was also a useless exercise, but the mind was keen, and the thought always lurked that if I did not become a dwij (i.e. twice-born or baptised after the thread-ceremony) then life itself is worthless. Therefore, I used to be very much upset and prayed continuously to God to show a way out.

Those were the days when the independence movement was going strong, and brilliant people were struggling for the attainment of indendence of the country. From place to place, dedicated people went to sow the seeds of the freedom-movement and educate people about the same. There was no local leader at

Bharatpur, but a highly learned person, Pandit Revtisharan came there from Agra and started a campaign of awakening the local population for the independence movement. Panditji was also a highly respected figure in the religious field and he used to lecture to people not only on independence for India, but also on religion and spiritualism.

So, I thought that I should somehow try and meet him and tell him about my problems. so, one day I gathered courage, met Pandit Revatisharanji and told him about my desire for the holy-thread rites and the problems involved. After listening to me, Panditji remained silent for some time, then said, "Come to-morrow morning, wearing a dhoti. I shall perform the holy-thread rites for you." On hearing this, my joy knew no bounds and the next day I presented myself before Pandit Revatisharanji as instructed. Panditji performed the holy rites and initiated me into the Gayatri mantra.

After initiating me into the Gayatri mantra not only did, he tell me about regularly reciting the Gayatri mantra, but also instructed me to keep three points always in my mind, and follow them throughout the life. These were as follows: 1) To keep working always. He said "Never be shy about labour. Labour is God, and the more you work, the more the God will be pleased and fulfil your life. 2) Be honest. Honesty is the best policy. Those who adopt will certainly be successful.

In the beginning some persons will be seen to be suffering a loss but these are actually difficulties arising from unfamiliar situations. They will clear up after some time and the person starts getting the fruits of honesty. 3) The third thing he said was to keep improving one's self and said, "this is the only path to progress. If you keep on improving your qualities, then results of your labour coupled with honesty will go on multiplying by day and night. All three pieces of advice are equally important and all three must be acted upon. Then only the life becomes fulfilled" I absorbed these three pieces of advice fully in my mind and started implementing these injunctions from then onwards.

As said earlier, Pandit Revatisharanji had also instructed me to perform regularly the sandhya-vandan ritual and the Gayatri mantra recitation. He taught me the proper procedure for these and told me to recite Gayatri mantra at least 324 times (3 rosaries of 108 beads each). He also advised that at the time of the Gayatri- japa (recitation) I must picture before my mind's eye the image of sun as symbolic of Savita Devta and to absorb from God sadgun (good qualities), satkarma (good acts) and sadbuddhi (good thoughts).

I adopted the above programme. The daily prayers used to be over in a short time, but the feelings and emotions involved. in those prayers lingered with me throughout the day, and I adopted the policy of mingling with goodwill towards everyone and co-operating with all. I was always available for everyone, whether he was elder to me or younger to me. Never kept ill-will for anyone nor did I harm anyone. This policy endeared me to everyone.

One Panditji was an accountant in our office. He showed a lot of goodwill towards me and told me to start studies. I told him that I did not know anyone who would teach me. He said that in the mornings-evenings whenever it was convenient for me, I could go to his home. He would teach me for one hour daily, I considered this opportunity as a blessing and started going to Panditji at his home for studying under him. I used to visit his home earlier and carry out odd jobs there. His wife started treating me as her own son and used to tell me to take my meal there only.

Not only that, but she used to indulge me. This programme of studies continued. Gradually a situation developed in which all the people in the office recommended me unanimously to the higher-ups, for giving me a higher post and the officers did likewise and increased my salary by two times of what I was getting. Now the facilities increased as well as the responsibilities, which I fulfilled with the same sincerity as before.

But I was not satisfied with the prospects in the office. I wanted to progress even more and suddenly an opportunity presented itself in the form of taking charge of distribution of the food-grains to all the shops because Government had introduced rationing. Rationing was introduced because on the one hand the world-war had slowed down the economy, there was severe inflation and simultaneously there were famine-like condition in many parts of India. To prevent chaos and food-riots, Government introduced rationing to ensure food for even the poorest sections of the people. I discharged this task with total honesty and earned the goodwill of many traders.

As a result of the goodwill earned as a rationing-officer, I was able to start my own business at Nadvai in Bharatpur which prospered from day to day. But then a situation developed in which I had to wind up the business and pay off the full amount which I owed to the creditors. From Nadvai I went to town called Dabra where I decided to enter into the field of textiles. My reputation had gone before me to the traders and merchants at Dabra, and much earlier I had even developed relations with some textile-mill owners.

This may have been one reason that all of them welcomed me into the textiles-field. At that time there were 40 textile-mills at Dabra. The mill owners proposed that I should take up the post of the head of the association. The responsibility involved was extremely important. It was part of my job to create harmony and to prevent the creation of misunderstanding and bitterness between two or more establishments. If bitterness sometimes arose, then it was also part of my job to resolve it.

Simultaneously it was also part of the job to find out solutions to external problems. When these leaders of the textile community considered me fit to repose their trust in me, I too decided it will be my duty to work in such a way as to deserve that trust. I liked to accept challenges, and since the above job required facing challenges, I willingly accepted it. By that time Gurudev had proclaimed the Yug Nirman movement. The construction at Gayatri Tapobhoomi had already started.

The campaigns of the Gayatri-yagnas began and programmes for the spread of satpravrutti (good activities, activities for moral revival with a religious base) started in earnest. Perhaps the mission was not yet called Yug Nirman Yojana (plan). At that time reverend Gurudev used to emphasise very much on pure spiritualism. At such a time of the beginning of the Yug Nirman Mission, I came across reverend Gurudev. My first meeting was of a very ordinary nature, but when I met Him, I felt that the compassion and grace of this Divine Power has been with me since a long long time. Although my contact and relationship with Him gradually increased and became strong.

My first contact with him was during the Gayatri Mahayagna at Dabra. The local mission-workers had arranged this programme and requested my co-operation. Besides my humble contribution, in my capacity as President of the Association of Textile Mills, I wrote a letter to all the industrialists and received a contribution which was six times more than expected. Not only did the textile-mill-owners contribute, but also went to the railway station to receive him.

When I saw him at the station, I found him very much different from what I had imagined. The conventional image of a Guru normally is that of a saffron-clad ascetic with long moustache and beard and with a tilak (sandal-paste and vermillion applied) on forehead, wearing beads around the neck and holding a kamandal (a vessel for carrying drinking water) in one hand.

When the train arrived, I was looking for such a person. So, I told the mission-worker, “Gurudev has not come." They replied, "Gurudev has arrived, here he is." What I saw was a decent person wearing ordinary dhoti and kurta carrying luggage in his own hands getting down from the third-class compartment. I could not immediately come to believe that the persons whose writings move one's emotions, is this very same one.

Earlier I had been exposed by his literature and after reading it I was highly impressed by the author's intelligence, profound spiritual progress, deep thinking and going to the root of a subject, and my head used to bow with deep reverence to such a profound personality. So, when I saw Gurudev before me, looking simple and without any ostentation, I could see his greatness hidden behind such simplicity. On hearing his lectures and taking part in discussions, I felt that I am getting an opportunity of meeting a great thinker of this era.

The yagna was performed at Dabra and I came nearer to Gurudev, and he told me to visit him sometime at Mathura. His invitation was almost like a loving order to me, but my mind and nature, so far involved in a different world, were creating obstacles. Whenever I thought about Gurudev or remembered him, many a time I felt, "Why should I have any relationship with the world of religion and spiritualism which tells me to give up my comfortable life and adopt a simple life, in its place. No doubt Gurudev's simplicity had impressed me, but I had no desire or expectation to adopt the same in my life." Besides reading "Akhand Jyoti” magazine, I started reading his books one by one and was inspired to implement his advice in transactions with people.

One day I went to Mathura, and on reaching the 'Akhand Jyoti' office in Ghia Mandi, met Mataji there. This was my first introduction to Mataji. Gurudev was in Mathura only, but not in the office. So, I started talking with Mataji. She asked about my health and immediately went into the kitchen to arrange for my lunch. Prepared fresh lunch for me and like my mother, lovingly served lunch. It is easy to write this in just a sentence, but to experience the deep feeling behind it is something different altogether. Having lost my mother at the age of one-and-a-half years, I had never known mothers love. I had only heard from children of my age about how mothers love and indulge their children. On hearing it, I used to envy them and feel pained.

Many incidents flashed before my eyes when I missed my mother and relieved my heart by going to a comer and crying there. But all the deficiency felt by mother's absence and all the pain and tears were wiped away by that first

experience of lovingly-fed lunch. The interesting thing is that sometime later, Gurudev came and told her about me. Before this I had already introduced me and given my name address etc.... During the talks, Gurudev informed me about the 1000- Kundiya yagna he was going to perform in the Gayatri Tapobhoomi area and told me that I too have to be there. Upto now Gurudev had impressed my mind, but the loving care showered on me by Mataji had created a surge of faith in me. There was no question of saying 'no' to Gurudev's invitation.

I went to Mathura sufficiently earlier and requested Gurudev to give me work for the 1000-kundiya yagna. The yagna was on a very large scale. Definitely more than 500,000 persons would be attending, and a whole battalion of volunteers would be required for service in such a vast programme. I thought it is better to be present earlier because one does not know how much preparation has taken place. Rev. Gurudev told me to keep accounts of the whole programme, to disburse money as required and keep an account of the money received as donation.

I estimated the calculations on the basis of 500,000 persons attending the Yagna. They would be staying for 4 days. At the rate of 2 meals per day costing Rs. 2=00 per meal, the expenses on meals alone would be at least Rs. 40 lakhs. Other expenses would include money spent on accommodation-facilities, paraphernalia for the Yagna, Dakshina (gift in the form of money) to the priests, expenses for the pandals and other expenses. The money received was given to people who were erecting the tents at the location. I was worried about arrangement for the other expenses.

So, I expressed my fear before Gurudev who said, "Why should we worry about it? This is God's work, God himself will make the arrangements," and really God. "arranged" for it. This vast programme, a new way of Mahakumbh Yagna was performed with such ease - that those who took part in it are singing its praise event-day and say "Na bhooto, na bhavishyati" (such a fine event was not seen in the past nor will it be seen in the future). The divine side of Gurudev was revealed to me from this event. The faith took very deep roots in my heart that Gurudev is not an ordinary human being but a Divine Power.

God himself incarnated in His Form. Once upon a time who was Ram and Krishna, both have now come here in a combined. form in Gurudev's mortal frame. This was the Fourth turning point in my belief. First of all, I knew Gurudev as a great author, then he seemed as a living symbol of Indian culture and now He seems to me in the form of the very God.

By that time the ancient literature with Gurudev's explanations was already published. One set of the entire literature was presented to Shri Vishwanathdas who was then the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. He had visited the Tapobhoomi and I was involved in looking after him. He was highly impressed by the founder of the Tapobhoomi, i.e. Rev. Gurudev. While leaving he said, “I came for a pilgrimage to Krishna Nagari (i.e. Mathura, the place where Lord Krishna was born). I have not had a darshan (view) of Lord Krishna in person, but saw Him inside you". On hearing this comment of the Governor, my faith was further strengthened that Gurudev is not a human being but a Divine Power, only i.e. 'God.'

After that my Desire increased to involve myself more and more with Gurudev. So, I attended all the Shibirs (workshops) which were organised after the above-referred mahayagna. There was a series of workshops, such as on Navaratri sadhana (special worship during nine days), shiksha-sammelan (conference on education), Swasthya-ayurved-prakrutik chikitsa (health and treatment by ayurvedic system, naturopathy), Yoga, Surya-chikitsa (treatment with solar-energy), sanskar-shibir (on performing sacramental rites), Gita shibir (explanations on the Gita), Ramayan shibir (explanation on Ramayana), Bhagwat satra (the holy Bhagwat explained) etc.

As mentioned above, I attended each one of them and made it a point not to miss a single class. I was impressed by the Akhand Jyoti lamp (the eternal-light lamp) in the worship- room of Gurudev and started a similar lamp at my home also. On returning from his journey to the Himalayas, when Gurudev asked me to come down to Tapobhoomi, he shifted the Akhand-Jyoti (Eternal-light lamp) to his room. This was in preparation for arrangements for permanently shifting me to Mathura. In 1967 I shifted permanently to Mathura. The lamp lighted by me had been burning continuously for 10 years. As a symbol of my soul merging with that of my Guru i.e. Gurudev, the flame of my wick- lamp was merged into Gurudev's Akhand-Jyoti lamp.

When I was preparing to shift to Mathura, I remember very well that there was a non-stop series of shibirs (workshops) at the Tapobhoomi, but in those days, the number of people attending the shibirs was kept limited. The devotees used to stay in Tapobhoomi. Reverend Gurudev and Reverend Mataji used to visit every morning from Akhana Jyoti magazine's office to Tapobhoomi First Mataji would sing a devotional song. Then Gurudev used to lecture for one hour, after which, all the devotees used to go to Gurudev's home, take their lunch there,

and return. It was a unique experience to walk along with Gurudev and and devotees to walk to Gurudev's home. On returning, we used to discuss about future plans and programmes.

As mentioned in a preceding paragraph, I shifted permanently to Mathura. Gurudev had started preparations for shifting to Haridwar. He decided that in future he would rarely undertake a journey. Hence the various branches of Yug Nirman Parivar (family) were competing with each other to ensure that Gurudev should visit them before going into seclusion at Haridwar. So, they started sending proposals for performing Gayatri mahayagna and Yug-Nirman-conferences in their areas.

As per the convenience of time available, these proposals were accepted and instructions were given about their organisation. Most of the time I went with Gurudev to these programmes. At that time, I had no idea that in this way he was introducing me to his family - the Yug Nirman family - and making me mingle with them with a definite purpose. But more about it later, first let me relate about my family of one daughter and two sons.

Before shifting to Mathura, I had almost discharged my family-responsibilities. One daughter was married much earlier. Two sons were now earning independently, but both were not yet married.

After coming to Mathura, the wish was still there that I should arrange their marriages. At least the elder son Ram should be married now. The younger son, Satish can wait. So, I told Gurudev about it. God knows what Gurudev thought, but he told me not to think about Ram's marriage, but to get Satish married. In Indian society it appears odd if the younger son gets married before the elder one, and people start gossiping about it. I was confused because I could not understand Gurudev's way of thinking, and told him, "What will people say?" Three four times I made the above representation to Gurudev and he would repeat the same advice, that is, I should get the younger son married.

In 1971 preparations were on for giving a farewell to Gurudev at Mathura. In the same ceremony ideal marriages i.e. without dowry and with the least expenses were to be performed as part of the programme for social reformation. I once again pleaded with Gurudev to arrange for Ram's marriage. Mataji was also present. She said, "O.k., I know of a girl. Consider Ram's engagement with Mrutyunjay's wife's sister (Mrutyunjay is the son of Rev-Gurudev). Thus, in June

1971, Ram was married. I and my wife were very happy that Gurudev and Mataji had blessed this marriage.

The people of Mathura bid farewell to Gurudev and Mataji with a heavy heart. In the ceremony Gurudev announced that he was appointing Pandit Lilapat Sharma as the organising officer to succeed him. All the persons should consider him as their elder brother. He had repeatedly said it in his letters and personal discussions. Three years before Gurudev left Mathura, there were almost continuous large-scale yagna-programmes for 3 years and I was with Guruji in almost all programmes.

In talks with mission- workers, he would introduce me and say that after him, only Lilapat would oversee the work of the organisation. On Gayatri- Jayanti day in 1971 Gurudev left Mathura for Shantikunj, Haridwar. From that day onwards, I do not remember any event when the devotees of the mission ignored the above directive of Rev. Gurudev. Also, I do not remember any moment when I became lazy in discharging my responsibility.

Before departing from Mathura, Gurudev also clearly specified that as part of the Gyanyagna the movement to spread knowledge), the Vichar Kranti Abhiyan (bringing about a revolutionary transformation in the way of thinking) consists of two aspects - one side is Satsang (reading scripture on God and discussions on the same) and the second side is swadhyaya (introspection and self-study).

Both are as important as two wings for a bird and our two centres (Mathura and Haridwar) will look after one each. Under this scheme, the Satsang aspect came under Shantikunj, Haridwar and Swadhyaya under Gayatri Tapobhoomi at Mathura. Thus, after Gurudev came at Haridwar, numerous shibirs (workshops) were conducted at Haridwar and Gayatri Tapobhoomi published hundreds of new books and this programme continues unabated.

Now I did not have to worry about my sons. Ram's business was going on. Younger son Satish was also married. He became a doctor and started his practice. Both sons were settled properly and for 20 years life went on smoothly, but one day I received a message that Ram is seriously ill. I rushed to him at Gwalior city and found that his condition was serious. He found it very difficult to breathe. He was not able to retain anything in his stomach, not even the medicines. The best doctors at Gwalior were consulted and they said that Ram's condition was critical and he should immediately be given very good intensive

care. He was shifted from Gwalior to Mathura, from there to Agra and then to Delhi. Only a miracle saved him but it took four months for Ram to recover.

I kept Ram with me at Mathura during that period. Ram had almost recovered when one day his health suddenly deteriorated and knowing the past history of his health, we immediately took him to Delhi for treatment. Doctors told that now there is no cause for worry, everything will be all right. We thought that when he was critically ill, he was saved, then why should anything go wrong now? But the worst happened and suddenly Ram was no more. Only I myself and Ram's wife Indira were present when Ram suddenly expired.

Gurudev's son Mrutyunjay had gone out to buy medicines. How Indira bore this severe blow is very difficult to imagine, but she was made of sterner stuff and gave us courage. She said, “Pitaji(father), now I only am Ram for you". By that time Mrutyunjay had returned, and Indira said that she will take him home. I had never seen Indira so calm and firm ever before. Any father will break down at the untimely death of a son and for a young wife, the sudden passing away of her husband is sheer torture, but we only know how Indira handled the situation and consoled and looked after us.

In the above situation, many a time I even thought whether the result of all my worship, my surrender was all this only? How can I tell others that the spiritual path is a definite path to progress, happiness and peace? Many devotees also wrote to me questioning the bonafide of Gayatri worship. But I was not willing to accept their stance. I did not doubt the blessings of Mata Gayatri even one bit, but felt that whatever happened was due to something lacking within me. Even then a crack did occur in my mind. Not once but many times doubts would arise regarding my faith, my worship, my service, my surrender to Gurudev.

The same mental condition persisted day and night and even when going for prayers in front of the image of Gayatri Mata in the prayer-room, the pain persisted and when bowing to the padukas (wooden sandals of Gurudev), the mind was continuously wavering. One day the mental pressure became so unbearable that I felt as if my head would burst. At that time Gurudev's voice was heard in my heart. He was saying, "Neither spiritual endavour, nor worship nor surrender is invain. Even the path which you have adopted, the path of serving the people is also the correct one. Why do you think that inspite of all this, Ram has left you. The truth is that Ram remained with you as a result of all the above, otherwise he was supposed to leave long before only.

Only then did it suddenly occur to me as to why Gurudev was not giving permission for Ram's marriage. I felt as if Mataji used her special privilege to get Ram married and Rev. Gurudev extended his life-span, by a few years. This extension is by over twenty years. The extended life-span was to be over in April 1991 at Gwalior, but out of sheer love, rev... Mataji benevolently gave a part of her accumulated spiritual achievement for Ram's benefit and extended his life by four more months. Her thinking behind this was that the children should be cared for in a well-protected area, and what better place for that than Mathura? This was accomplished within four months.

Gurudev's voice was echoing in my heart. "It is natural for you to be broken-hearted, but compare Indira's pain with yours. How much severe for her to bear it? Your pain is more an emotional one, whereas for Indira it is a question of her future and of her three children. Even while facing these problems, she is calm. So learn to bear your pain. Remember, I always took you with me on my tours. You were with me in my tours before I left Mathura and after wards at the time of inauguration of the various shaktipeeths (branches of Gayatri-mission) you were with me. When it was not possible for you to accompany me, I stopped going for the inauguration of the programmes. you are inseparably united with me."

I asked, "Now, what is your directive?" The answer too came in the heart, "Start writing". I said, "Gurudev, I never had the opportunity of attending school. I am able to read and reply to letters. That's all - " Hardly did I finish, when he said, "Why worry about it? Kabir was not an educated person. He did not know even to read and write. Even then God inspired him to sing his experiences. He started singing and such profound literature poured forth that even to-day learned men in universities spend their entre time and talents to understand it. Even then they are not satisfied that they are not able to fully absorb it in their hearts".

Gurudev's voice further said, "When the heart is inspired and the Divine power chooses a medium then no other ability is re- quired. Just like Kabir or Surdas or Meera, you also consider yourself a bamboo flute for the Divine Power's play. The melody would come out by itself". I was consoled about daughter-in-law Indira also. Gurudev's voice said, "Twenty-four years ago when you surrendered yourself and your welfare to me, then why worry now? I have to bear Indira's responsibility, and not you... She will be working for the mission. Being the daughter-in-law of the family, earlier she was working indirectly for the mission but now she will work directly for Yug Nirman and prove her ability". Gurudev

advised me to sit in the morning for writing, and he himself would "tell' me what to write.

So, I started sitting down for writing and the inspiration came that I should start writing down the lectures which Gurudev used to give at Shibirs (workshops) before 1971. So, I started searching for the notes kept somewhere long long ago. Fortunately, I was able to locate them. But the writing and the contexts were difficult to understand. Here also Gurudev assured me that I have to sit down just once to read them with determination, and everything will be fine. then it was easy for me to start writing down from these notes. Publication started, and a series of ten books was published.

This biography of Gurudev was also written in this way. used to sit down regularly for writing just like sitting down regularly for one's daily prayers.

Gurudev was on this earth for 80 years. I do not have the capacity to understand his Divine Form, but his mortal form is also unimaginably vast. It is also so full of incidents that it took several years to compile. Extremely difficult as this task is, it was easily accomplished by Gurudev's grace, and after becoming his medium for several months, whatever came to the mind, has been produced here.